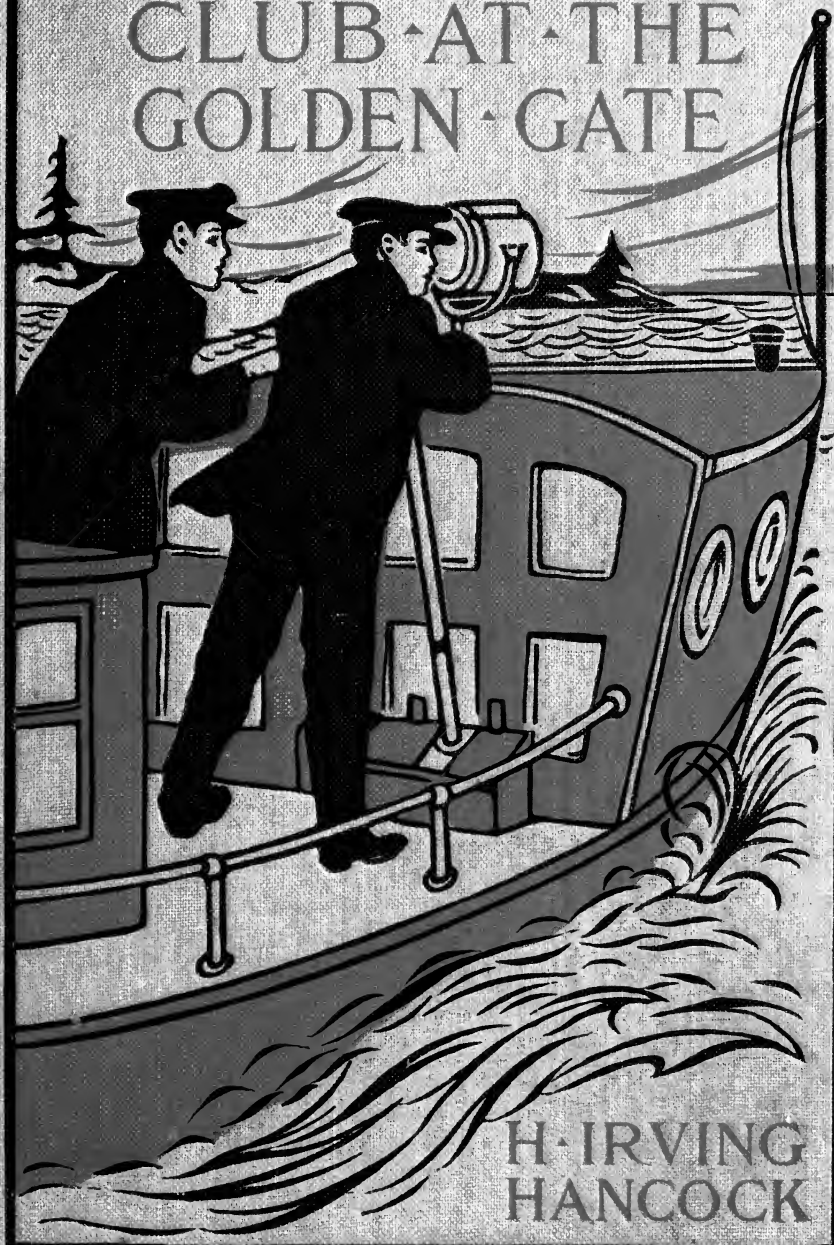


THE MOTOR-BOAT CLUB AT THE GOLDEN GATE



H·IRVING
HANCOCK





"I Trust You, But I'll Hold Onto the Pitcher."

Frontispiece.

The Motor Boat Club at the Golden Gate

OR

A Thrilling Capture in the Great Fog

By

H. IRVING HANCOCK

Author of The Motor Boat Club of the Kennebec, The Motor Boat
Club at Nantucket, The Motor Boat Club off Long
Island, The Motor Boat Club and the
Wireless, The Motor Boat Club
in Florida, etc., etc.

Illustrated

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The Motor Boat Club at The Golden Gate

CHAPTER I

TOM HALSTEAD, KNIGHT OF THE OVERLAND MAIL

I FEEL it in my bones," announced Joe Dawson, quietly though positively.

"That's no talk for an engineer," jibed Tom Halstead. "Tell me, instead, that you read it in your gauge."

"Oh, laugh, if you want to," nodded Dawson, showing no offense. "But you'll find that I'm right. You know, I don't often make predictions."

"Yet, this time, you feel that something disastrous is going to happen before this train rolls out on the mole at Oakland? In other words, before we set foot in San Francisco?"

"No, I don't say quite that," objected Joe, thoughtfully. "There's a heap of the navigator about you, Tom Halstead, and you're pinning me down to the map and the chronometer. I won't predict quite as closely as that. But, either before we reach 'Frisco, or mighty soon

after we get there, something is going to happen."

"And it's going to be a disaster?" questioned Tom, closely.

"For someone, yes; and we're going to be in it, at great risk."

"Well, it's a comfort to have it narrowed down even as closely as that," smiled Tom Halstead. "I hope it isn't going to be another earthquake, though."

"No," agreed Joe, thoughtfully.

"Oh, well, that much of your prediction will comfort the people of San Francisco, anyway."

"Now, you're laughing at me again," grinned Joe, good-naturedly.

"No; I'm not," protested Halstead, but belied himself by the twinkle in his eyes, and by whistling softly the air of a popular song that the boys had heard in a New York theatre just before leaving for the West.

At the present moment both boys were sitting comfortably facing each other in their section in a sleeping car on the luxurious Overland Mail. It was early forenoon. They had left Sacramento behind some time before, on the last stretch of the run across the state of California.

Joe Dawson was riding facing forward. Tom Halstead, in the seat opposite, half lolled at the window-ledge, with his back toward the engine.

Both boys had slept well on their last night out from San Francisco. Both had breakfasted heartily, that morning, in the dining car now left behind at the state capital. The next thing that would interest them, so far as they could now guess, would be their arrival at Oakland, and the subsequent ferry trip that would land them in San Francisco.

It may seem a curious fact to the reader, but neither Tom Halstead nor Joe Dawson knew just what new phases of life awaited them in the City by the Golden Gate. They were engaged to enter the employment of a man who owned a motor yacht. The owner had agreed to their own terms in the way of salary, and he was paying all their expenses on this luxurious trip westward. Moreover, the same owner had engaged some of the other members of the Motor Boat Club of the Kennebec, as will soon be told.

Readers of the preceding volumes of this series are already well acquainted with bright, energetic, loyal and capable Tom Halstead, who, from the start, had held the post of fleet captain of the Motor Boat Club. The same readers are equally familiar with the career of Joe Dawson, fleet engineer of the Club.

As narrated in "THE MOTOR BOAT CLUB OF THE KENNEBEC," Tom and Joe were two boys of seafaring stock, and natives of Maine, having been

born near the mouth of the Kennebec River. That first volume detailed how the two young men served aboard the "Sunbeam," the motor yacht of a Boston broker, and how the boys aided the Government officers in solving the mystery of Smugglers' Island. Out of those adventures arose the founding of the Club, with Tom and Joe at its head.

In "THE MOTOR BOAT CLUB AT NANTUCKET" the two boys were again seen to great advantage. There they had some most lively sea adventures, all centering around the abduction of the Dunstan heir. Next, as told in "THE MOTOR BOAT CLUB OFF LONG ISLAND," the motor boat boys played an exciting part in the balking of a great Wall Street conspiracy. In recognition of their services at this time, the man whom they most helped presented them with a fifty-five foot cruising motor boat, which the two proud young owners named the "Restless." Afterwards they installed a wireless telegraph apparatus on the boat, and then came one of their truly famous cruises, as related in "THE MOTOR BOAT CLUB AND THE WIRELESS," wherein wireless telegraphy was employed in ferreting out one of the great mysteries of the sea.

"THE MOTOR BOAT CLUB IN FLORIDA" described the sea wanderings of Captain Tom and Engineer Joe in the Gulf waters, and their sub-

sequent adventures in the Everglades and at Tampa, including the laying of the Ghost of Alligator Swamp.

From time to time other seafaring boys, whose experience aboard motor yachts qualified them, were elected members of the Motor Boat Club, an organization which now boasted some forty members along the Atlantic seaboard. Several of these boys had made themselves barely less famous than had Halstead and Dawson.

Broker George Prescott, of Boston, their first employer and founder of the Club, was still their staunch friend. So, too, in scarcely less degree, was Francis Delavan, a Wall Street financier to whom Tom and Joe had rendered most valuable services.

It was through Mr. Delavan that Halstead and Dawson had secured their present engagement, the details of which they did not yet know. This engagement had come just as the young men were leaving Florida waters in January, preparatory to making their way to New York, near which great city the "Restless" was now laid up, out of commission at present, though as seaworthy a boat as ever.

Tom had been allowed to engage Jeff Randolph, the Florida member of the Club, for this new, unknown enterprise. Jeff was believed to be either on his way, or already in San Fran-

cisco, at the Palace Hotel, on Market Street, which was to be the meeting place of the motor boat boys.

Yet there were other old friends due to meet the fleet captain and fleet engineer. Mr. Delavan had also engaged, by wire, Dick Davis and Ab Perkins, of Maine, now back from a famous trip to Brazil as told in "THE MOTOR BOAT CLUB AND THE WIRELESS." Jed Prentiss, a Nantucket member of the Club, was also on his way to or in San Francisco to join them, thanks to Mr. Prescott's interest. How Jed joined the Club, and proved himself more than worthy, was all told in "THE MOTOR BOAT CLUB AT NANTUCKET."

The name of the San Francisco man who had engaged six members of the Motor Boat Club to cross the continent was Joseph Baldwin. Beyond this the boys knew nothing of him, save that Francis Delavan had vouched for him. That was enough. Not even the name of Baldwin's craft was known to the seafaring boys who were crossing the continent.

"I wonder if Mr. Baldwin will be at Oakland, to meet us?" asked Joe, as the train sped evenly, swiftly along.

"It isn't likely," replied Tom. "He has told us where to report. I fancy he considers that enough."

"A man might get a boat's crew together a

good deal more cheaply," mused Joe, aloud. "Our fellows that Mr. Baldwin has engaged are all top-notchers in the way of salary. With such a crew it's going to cost our man a good deal to keep his boat running."

"You know the reputation that California millionaires have, Joe," laughed his chum. "It is said of them that they'd sooner spend money than keep it drawing interest."

"Still," pondered Joe Dawson, "I don't believe California people like to pitch money out of the window any better than people of other sections do."

"It has struck me," Tom went on, "that we're engaged by a man who is running a racing boat. If that is so, and we can get the top speed out of his craft, then I suppose Mr. Baldwin wouldn't consider the matter of expense at all. All he wants, in that case, is to win cups and build a big reputation for his boat."

"I hope it is a racer," cried Joe, his eyes glistening. "Whew! How our crowd, pulling together in team work, could make a boat everlastingly sprint over the waves!"

The car in which the two boys sat was the last of the train. It had an observation platform at the rear. In this observation compartment the motor boat boys had spent much time while the train was rolling along through the highly pic-

turesque scenery of the Rocky Mountains. This morning, however, going swiftly past sun-lit sections of California, over a nearly level road, both young travelers were content to remain in their seats by the window.

In the car were a dozen other passengers. Only one other besides the motor boat boys was especially young. She was a girl of about eighteen, blond, rather plump and very pretty. She appeared to be traveling alone, having boarded the train at Kansas City. Tom and Joe had been able to offer her a few travelers' courtesies, which had been graciously accepted. Neither young man, however, knew the girl's name. Both motor boat boys were too well bred to attempt to force an acquaintance.

Just now, as Tom happened to lean over his seat and glance down the aisle, he saw that this young lady was in the observation compartment. She appeared to be alone there. Something in the expression on her face made her seem highly uneasy about something.

"I hope she isn't in any trouble," murmured Halstead, to himself, "and that she isn't going to find anything unpleasant at the end of her journey."

The next time he glanced down the aisle Halstead again caught a glimpse of her face.

"By Jove, I believe she's been crying, or else

is about to begin," muttered the young captain. "I wonder if it's real trouble, or just something that she's afraid of."

Then Tom made haste to look away, lest the young lady should see that he had been studying her and take offense.

"Look at the roses," commented Joe, glancing out of the window at a pretty little California village through which the train was passing at somewhat lessened speed. "Great Scott, there are violets growing in the garden we've just passed. February! Think of the deep feet of snow on either bank of the Kennebec just now!"

"It's the land of roses and other posies, all right," agreed Halstead, himself looking out with a good deal of interest at the bright scene under the soft haze of the California winter day.

"Say, these are real days! This beats Florida!" exclaimed Joe, enthusiastically.

"When it doesn't rain," remarked the practical Halstead. "You know, this is the rainy season in California."

"I don't care," contended Joe. "Even on a rainy day it must be beautiful in this fine old state."

"And on a foggy one, also," laughed Tom. "You know, at this time of the year, there are likely to be some great old fogs around San

Francisco Bay. I've heard that it takes a clever pilot to guess correctly whether he's landing at San Francisco or Oakland."

"Humph!" grunted Joe.

Dawson turned, looking out of the window for some time without speaking.

"We're getting near some big town," he remarked, at last. Then, after glancing at his watch: "It must be Oakland."

"Yes," nodded Tom. "I guess we'll soon be making our stop at the Sixteenth Street station."

"Anything special about that station?"

"It's the last stop before we run out onto the mole at Oakland."

The train had now begun to run, at greatly lessened speed, through one of the streets of the city. Joe found less to interest him. He glanced upward at the rack, toward his traveling bag and overcoat.

"That overcoat seems like an insult to the climate," he remarked.

"Don't throw it away," advised Tom Halstead, "until you see whether some of the 'Frisco nights are chilly. I've sort of an idea they will be."

"I wonder whether we're going to have much time ashore, or whether it will be all spent on the water?" suggested Joe. But Tom, of course, didn't know the answer.

"Sixteenth Street next stop!" called the porter through the car.

"Might as well stretch our legs," hinted Tom, rising. Joe also left his seat.

As several of the passengers in the car were heading toward the front end, the motor boat boys started for the observation compartment at the rear end.

The young lady was still standing there. It looked as though she intended to step down outside as soon as the train should come to a stop. Not wishing to intrude, Tom Halstead halted, a few feet away, Joe doing the same.

Hardly had the train stopped when a porter opened the door of the observation compartment. The young lady quickly descended, the boys following. The young lady remained close to the steps, glancing about her. Lifting their hats, Tom and Joe stepped past her, mingling in the throng at the station. There wasn't much here to see, but it was a relief to be quit of the train for a minute or two.

"There's the engine bell ringing," nudged Joe, at last. "We may as well hustle back."

As the two motor boat boys turned once more, Tom saw the young woman standing beside the rear steps, one hand holding to the brass rail. She appeared rather frightened. Before her, talking rapidly, was a man of perhaps thirty

years of age and some five feet nine inches in height. On his smooth-shaven, dark face rested an ugly, black look. Something that the man said just as Tom glanced that way caused the girl to wince and grow paler.

"Why, that fellow has been on the train, though not in our car, for the last two days," occurred to Halstead, swiftly. "And now I remember I saw the young lady talking to him back at Battle Mountain. Jove! but she seems afraid of him. There, she's trying to leave him, and he has caught at her sleeve to hold her. Confound the ugly look in his eyes! I wish she were *my* sister for five minutes!"

Almost unconsciously, in his indignation, Captain Tom increased his pace. Joe, looking in another direction, did not at once perceive this, and so fell a bit behind.

"I'm not going to listen to you any longer," cried the young woman, in a voice that sounded tearful, though she was resolutely keeping the tears back out of her eyes. "You are talking like a coward!"

"Pardon me," said Captain Tom, rather stiffly, brushing past the young man. The girl edged to give the motor boat boy room on the steps, and, as he passed her, started to follow him up into the car.

"You're not going to leave me in that fash-

ion," snapped the dark young man, angrily.
"See here——"

Again he caught at the girl's sleeve, after leaping up onto the lowest step.

"Let me go," commanded the girl, indignantly.

"Not until——"

She wrenched herself free, then bounded after Halstead.

"Don't let him come into the car," begged the girl.

"Out of my way, young fellow," ordered the dark man, gaining the second step up.

"Is this man annoying you?" asked Tom, in a friendly tone of the girl, though he turned a cool, hostile stare upon the young man.

"Yes, he is," the young woman answered.

"Get out of the way, boy," commanded the man, reaching out a hand.

Tom Halstead's right hand closed instantly. His fist shot out, landing on the fellow's neck. That persecutor fell back, missed his footing, and went sprawling to the station platform. The girl had started to dart into the car, but now she turned, watching with fearful eyes.

"Oh, don't let him hurt you!" she cried to Tom.

"Thank you," responded the young captain, dryly; "I don't believe he will."

The train was beginning to move as the man fell sprawling on the platform. Joe, who had seen the blow struck, darted in, dragging the fellow swiftly to his feet.

"You'll have to hustle, mister, if you're going to get your car forward," Joe advised him.

"This car is the one I——" began the man.

But Joe coolly swung in ahead of him, elbowing the fellow out of the way. The next moment the porter, grinning, reached over with the key and locked the door of the car, which Dawson had closed.

Looking the picture of rage, the man darted swiftly down the platform. The train was now moving too rapidly, however, for the stranger to get aboard, and the last car rolled by him as he stood, baffled, on the platform.

"I—I don't know how to thank you both," faltered the girl.

"I assure you it didn't even put us to any inconvenience," smiled Captain Tom.

"But—oh! I hope you won't meet him in San Francisco," cried the girl, in sudden alarm. "He's dangerous, ugly, vengeful!"

"We've met such men before," laughed Captain Tom, quietly. "And yet——well, we're here."

"But you don't know that man!" shuddered the girl.

“That we don’t is something to brag about, I reckon,” smiled Joe.

“If you ever do come face to face with him, or catch him, anywhere, watching you, beware of him!” begged the young lady, earnestly. “He never forgives anything—that wretch!”

“Are you uneasy over the remainder of your journey?” asked Tom, politely. “Will you feel safer for escort?”

“Oh, I shall be all right, now,” replied the girl, with a grateful smile, though her cheeks were still pallid. “He is no longer on the train.”

“Command us, if you will,” begged Captain Tom Halstead, gallantly. He and Joe Dawson lifted their hats courteously, then passed on to their own section.

“One of the little dramas of life that are being enacted all around us,” muttered Halstead.

“I wouldn’t have minded seeing that one through,” returned Joe.

Neither boy, at that moment, suspected that they would yet “see it through.”

CHAPTER II

HAZING, M. B. C. K. STYLE

AT the ferry slip on the San Francisco side the two motor boat boys saw the young woman again.

A big, broad-shouldered, well-dressed, wholesome looking young man of twenty-two or twenty-three years of age, came forward eagerly, hat in hand, to meet her.

"She's all right, now," declared Joe, with satisfaction. "Gracious! That husky young fellow could eat up two or three muckers like the one you punched, Tom."

"Yes; our young lady of the journey is surely all right," nodded Halstead, delighted with what he had seen. "So come along, Joe. We'll probably never see any of that party again."

Through a throng of eager cabmen the two young motor boat boys plodded sturdily. Neither had ever been in San Francisco before, but they knew that the ferry came in at the foot of Market Street, and that the Palace Hotel was but a few blocks from the water-front on the same great artery of traffic.

"Might as well walk up, and get a little bit of a look at the town," proposed Halstead.

“Which side of the street is the Palace on?” queried Joe.

“East.”

“Then we’ll cross over. I don’t believe we can miss it.”

It was a bustling crowd through which the boys steered their way. The man on the San Francisco sidewalk who is under eighty years of age is engaged in making his fortune, and has no time to lose. After he has made it, he buys an automobile, and has comparatively little need of a sidewalk.

Men from every country in Europe and the Orient passed them. There was, of course, a large sprinkling of native Americans, yet even the chance passer knew that he was moving through a throng recruited from the four quarters of the world.

To Tom the walk ended all too soon. However, they were bent on business, not pleasure, so they turned in briskly through the main entrance of the Palace Hotel as soon as a policeman had pointed it out to them.

Captain Tom Halstead stepped to the desk, picking up a pen to register. “Are Davis, Perkins, Prentiss and Randolph here ahead of us?” queried Halstead, as soon as he had written his name and his chum’s.

“All of ’em,” smiled the clerk, after glancing

at the entry on the hotel register. "Davis, who got here first, with Perkins, engaged rooms close together for the whole party. Front! I'll have you shown right up, Captain Halstead."

The colored boy in blue uniform and brass buttons confiscated the bags and overcoats of the two young travelers, leading the way to the elevator. That bell-boy turned his head to conceal a grin that illumined his face.

"So our friends are all here ahead of us, and have everything ready?" remarked young Dawson.

The bell-boy, his head still turned away, seemed to be choking.

"I wonder if they've seen Mr. Baldwin, or heard from him?" mused Tom, aloud.

"Right dis way, sah," begged the bell-boy, stepping out of the elevator ahead of them at the third floor.

He led them down a long corridor, turned into another corridor, then halted before a door. That bell-boy gave three distinct knocks; a pause, then two more knocks.

"I reckon yo' can go right in, sah," announced the bell-boy, dropping some of his burden in order to throw the door open.

Utterly unsuspecting, Tom and Joe passed through the doorway. The instant they had done so, the bell-boy tossed their bags and coats

in after them, yanked the door shut and fled, chuckling.

"Here they come! Welcome!" roared Dick Davis's deep, hearty voice.

A short hallway led from the door to the room proper. As Tom Halstead passed over the inner threshold a pair of arms reached out from either side, yanking him into the room out of Joe's sight. Dawson leaped after his chum, only to be similarly seized.

Then it snowed! At least, for a brief instant, that was what the victims thought.

Tom was neatly, ruthlessly tripped, being sent sprawling to the floor, while Ab Perkins, snatching up a bolster, which he had ripped open, shook all the fine, downy feathers over him. They sifted down the young captain's neck; they obscured his vision; some of the small feathers fell into his mouth. He fell to spitting them out with vigor, even before he tried to get up.

Nor did Joe Dawson fare any better. If anything, he was rather more roughly handled by Jed Prentiss and Jeff Randolph.

"Now, roll 'em!" roared Dick Davis.

Before either of the newcomers could rise to his feet they were rolled together in the middle of the floor. Ab lifted the mattress from the bed, plumping it down over the two victims. Then all four of the gleeful assailants threw

themselves across the mattress, shoving it over the floor, using Tom and Joe, underneath, for rollers.

And, over it all, rose the famous club yell:

"M. B. C. K.! M. B. C. K.! Motor Boat Club! Wow!"

"Oh, but we're glad to see 'em!" yelled Dick Davis, in his deepest tones. "Good old chums! Keep up the welcome, fellows!"

From under the mattress Tom Halstead managed to make himself heard, though his voice sounded muffled indeed.

"Help!" he roared. "Turn out the port watch! Mutiny!"

"Port watch, ahoy! Roll up on deck, you lubbers!" roared Ab Perkins. "Cap'n wants you!"

At that Jed and Jeff left the mattress, darting to where Tom's and Joe's traveling bags lay. These they quickly opened, dumping all the contents on the floor.

"All hands to quell mutiny!" yelled Jed Prentiss. Dick Davis and Ab Perkins joined them on the jump.

That gave Tom and Joe, both very red-faced and much winded, a chance to crawl out from under the mattress.

Yet no sooner did they show their astonished faces than all four of the first-comers began to

pelt them with the articles dumped from the traveling bags.

Slippers flew straight and true, landing with swats. Hair brushes, tooth-brushes, cakes of soap, boxes of tooth-powder and numerous other articles filled the air, a veritable cyclone with the fleet captain and the fleet engineer in the middle of it.

"Cut it!" commanded Tom Halstead, sternly. "Oh, if I had my revolver and handcuffs and leg-irons here. This is the last time I'll ever go on deck without 'em. But cut it—anyway!"

Dick Davis, having thrown the last missile that came to hand, and having pitched Halstead's overcoat up in the air so that it now lay hanging from the chandelier, suddenly straightened up, looking very grave as he saluted and roared out:

"Aye, aye, sir!"

At that the other three disturbers of the peace lined up with Dick, all saluting.

"What's the meaning of all this riot?" insisted Halstead, trying to keep back the grin that struggled to his face.

"After not having seen each other for all these moons," demanded Davis, in a hurt voice, "can't we do anything to show you how ding-whanged glad we are to behold you two once more?"

"Your joy takes a strange turn," grimaced Captain Tom.

"I prefer people who put their welcome in writing," retorted Joe.

At that Ab Perkins, with a whoop, made for a table. From it he snatched up a cork, one end of which had been burned to a char.

"Come on, then, fellows," proposed Ab Perkins, gleefully; "we'll write our welcome on Joe's face."

"Will you, though?" demanded Dawson, crouching low, as though for a football tackle. He caught Ab, and rising with that boisterous youth, toppled him over. Ab Perkins went sprawling; fortunately for him he landed across the mattress.

"Hold on!" expostulated Tom Halstead. "The reception committee is excused—fired—bounced, in fact. Now, stop all this monkey-business, and let's get down to trade topics. But, first of all——"

Tom paused to spit out two or three fragments of down feathers. Then he crossed to where the water pitcher stood on a tray. Pouring out a glass of water, Halstead took a mouthful, while the late mutineers looked on expectantly.

"O-oh! Ugh! Waugh! Wow!" sputtered Tom, expelling his mouthful into a waste-water

jar beside the wash-stand. "That water's *salt!*"

"Well, what of it, you bo'sun's mate of a lobster trap?" demanded Ab Perkins, aggressively. "Is it the first time you've ever hit up against salt water?"

"Now, see here, fellows," grinned Halstead, looking around at the impish faces of the first-comers, "this is all right. We know how glad you are to see us. Your pleasure is far greater than we had ever dared to hope——"

"Oh, we can show more pleasure!" proposed Dick.

"Do it at your personal risk, then!" defied the young captain, arming himself with the water pitcher. "Now, then, will you all be quiet?"

"Oh, aye!" promised young Davis, with a sudden assumption of meekness.

"I trust you—trust you all to the death," affirmed Tom, grimly. "But I'm going to keep hold of the water pitcher just the same!"

"This deck doesn't look ship-shape, does it?" demanded Dick Davis, glancing about him. "Hadn't we better change craft? Wait here a moment."

Stepping to the push-button, he pressed twice, for the porter. Tom Halstead remained on guard, armed as before, and Joe keeping

rather close to him, until the porter knocked at the door.

"See here, my friend," remarked Dick, holding out a dollar bill to the porter, "there has been a ship-wreck here."

"It looks like it, sir," grinned the porter, pocketing the money. "What'll you have, sir?"

"Find the chambermaid that belongs on this floor," begged Dick, "and bring her here."

The porter was soon back with the chambermaid, who also received a dollar bill from young Davis.

"Now, you two try some team-work, please," begged Dick Davis, "and see whether you can make this place look neat enough to be a captain's cabin. Gentlemen of the Motor Boat Club, will you adjourn to the costly quarters that Ab and myself consider almost good enough for us?"

Tom Halstead laid down the water pitcher and passed out of the room last of all.

"I reckon you'd better go into the other room first, Joe, and let me bring up the rear," called Tom, grimly. "Then we can watch, from both ends of the line, for any new tricks."

Dick Davis produced a key, admitting all hands to the adjoining room.

"Now, be seated," proposed Davis, in his

most hospitable tone. The club members found chairs.

"Have you seen Mr. Baldwin?" inquired Captain Tom.

"No; but we've sent him word," Ab replied. "Mr. Baldwin has offices in the Chronicle Building."

"Is that near?" queried Halstead.

"Only a few hawser lengths from here, on the other side of Market Street," put in Jed Prentiss. "Come here to the window. There's the Chronicle Building over yonder."

"Mr. Baldwin has a telephone, of course?" suggested Captain Tom.

"Yes; 9378 Market."

"I can tell him we're here, then," murmured Tom, crossing the room to where a telephone apparatus rested against the wall.

"Don't," prompted Dick. "Mr. Baldwin has sent his orders. You can 'phone him between three and three-thirty to-day. Mustn't bother him at any other time."

"That's right, is it?" demanded Halstead, looking half-suspiciously at Davis.

"Quite right," nodded the latter youth, gravely. Dick was older than the others, being nineteen, as against a general average of sixteen years for the other boys. Dick was different in another respect. While the other five

boys followed motor boating as a means of livelihood, depending upon their earnings, young Davis, the son of a ship-builder of Bath, Maine, was at all times well supplied with money. Dick's outline for the future included a possible college course, and then breaking into the ship-building business with his father. It was not yet quite decided whether young Davis should omit the college part of the plan. In the meantime, the elder Davis believed that an active membership in the Motor Boat Club would be the best possible training to fit his son for a position in the ship-yard.

"Well, if those are the instructions, then," replied Captain Tom, returning to his chair, "we'll wait until a few minutes after three."

"And now it's half-past eleven," said Jed, consulting his watch. "Luncheon will not be served until one. We can wait here as well as anywhere. Say, fellows, I'm just crazy to hear some good old yarns of what you others have been through."

With that, yarn-spinning became the order of the day. The young men were still at it when they went down to the gorgeous dining room of the Palace Hotel. The air about their table was thick with yarns all through the meal.

While they sat around the table, absorbed in one another's stories, a dark-visaged, well-

dressed man of thirty started to enter the dining room. Just at the threshold, however, he paused, for his glance had alighted on a profile view of Captain Tom Halstead at one of the tables in the center of the dining room.

"That's the cub who struck me this morning," muttered the dark-faced one, drawing back. "I want to know who he is. I want to place him—I want to meet him and settle the account for that blow and the disappointment it brought about!"

Tom Halstead turned around, a moment later, but he did not see the man he had knocked from the train that morning at the Sixteenth Street station in Oakland. That worthy had drawn quickly back out of sight, and was now looking about for some hotel employé to question.

Ten minutes later he of the dark visage had all the information he felt he needed.

"Tom Halstead? So that's your name?" snarled the stranger, as he started for the street entrance. "And you're employed by Baldwin—could anything be more favorable to our meeting again, eh?" The stranger smiled darkly, meaningly, as he pronounced the name of Baldwin.

Luncheon over, the yarning motor boat boys embarked in the elevator. This time they went direct to the room assigned to Tom and Joe.

The trunks of these two young men had arrived, and now rested in the room.

Once more the yarning went on, until Captain Tom checked it at exactly two minutes past three o'clock.

CHAPTER III

CAPTAIN TOM'S NEW COMMAND

IT'S time for Mr. Baldwin to hear from us, now," announced the young skipper, rising and crossing to the room-telephone. He gave the number, waiting briefly.

"Hello," sounded a voice in the receiver.

"Hello," returned Tom, quietly. "Is this Mr. Baldwin?"

"No; wait a moment. I'll connect you."

"Hello," came, an instant later.

"Hello. Mr. Baldwin?"

"Yes."

"I am Captain Tom Halstead, here at the Palace Hotel, awaiting your orders."

"Is Dabson with you?"

"Dawson, sir," Tom corrected. "Yes; Dawson is with me."

"Then your whole crew is on hand?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good! Well, as the finishers are about

through with their repair work on my boat we shall be ready to get you aboard without delay."

"May I ask, sir, how big a boat——"

"Captain, be at my office, all of you in uniform, at four o'clock exactly."

"Very good, sir. Four o'clock."

"Captain Halstead, punctuality is one of my failings," warned Joseph Baldwin's voice.

"It's one of my studies, Mr. Baldwin."

"Then, at four o'clock?"

"Four o'clock, sharp, sir!"

"Good-bye."

Ting-ling-ling! Tom hung up the receiver.

"Well," came an eager chorus. "What are we going to do?"

"We're going to get into our club sailing uniforms," smiled Captain Tom, "and we're to be at Mr. Baldwin's office at four o'clock to the minute."

"What sort of a boat——"

"Cruising or racing——"

"Coasting or sea-voy——"

"You'll all of you have to cut out the questions," laughed Tom Halstead. "I've told you every blessed thing I've just learned over the 'phone. Fellows, I think our Mr. Baldwin is stingy——"

"Stingy?" broke in Ab Perkins, with fine

scorn. "And paying every one of us first-class salaries!"

"Stingy of words," finished Captain Tom, calmly. "If our new employer keeps on as he has begun, we won't know anything he means to do until the time comes to do it. Then he'll give his complete orders in from six to eight words. That's the way it looks. Now, for your uniforms. Come along, Joe, and we'll get into ours. Mr. Baldwin, I omitted to tell you, did inform me——"

Captain Tom paused, looking mysterious.

"Told you what?" chorused Dick, Ab and Jed, eagerly.

"That he's extremely partial to people who are punctual to the minute," finished Tom Halstead, making a sign that brought Joe along in his trail.

Sailors are accustomed to quick dressing, as they are to quick work of all sorts. Hence the six motor boat boys, all looking decidedly neat and important in their uniforms and visored caps, were soon on their way to the elevator shaft. Soon afterwards they stepped from the Palace entrance to the street, making for the other side of Market Street at the first crossing.

More than one swift pedestrian paused long enough to send a look back after these six trim, almost martial-looking young men, who walked

in pairs and carried themselves like graduates of the Naval Academy.

It was just five minutes before four o'clock when the sextette halted outside the Chronicle Building.

"A couple of minutes to breathe," announced Halstead, watch in hand. Presently, he marched them into the corridor. Here, after a short wait, they stepped into one of the several elevators, leaving it a few floors from the street.

"Sixty seconds yet to spare," whispered Captain Tom, smilingly, holding up his watch.

Precisely at the dot of four o'clock the six motor boat boys filed in at the door of the Baldwin offices, after Halstead had turned the knob.

In the outer office were several clerks, behind a railing. An office boy sat at a desk close by the gate of the railing.

"Mr. Baldwin expects us at four," stated Tom to the boy. "Will you please tell him that Captain Halstead and party are here?"

The boy disappeared. When he returned a briskly-moving man of fifty was at his heels. It was Joseph Baldwin, one of the rich men of the Pacific Coast, and one of its most daring promoters. He was a man who acted, ordinarily, as though the day were but five minutes long and crowded with business. Mr. Baldwin

looked like a prosperous business man, though there was nothing foppish in his attire.

"Captain Halstead?" he demanded, holding out a hand. The act was gracious enough, though hurried. In less than a minute Tom had presented his friends and all had been through the handshake.

Back of Mr. Baldwin stood a clerk, holding his employer's hat.

"I'm off for the day, Johnson," he announced. "Is the transportation at the door?"

"Yes, sir. I just looked out of the window. Your transportation is ready."

"Come along, Captain Halstead and gentlemen," directed Mr. Baldwin.

Though he led them swiftly, another clerk had slipped out ahead of them, and now stood by the elevator shaft. A car was just stopping at the floor. Down the party whizzed. Mr. Baldwin led the boys to a street door, outside of which two automobile touring cars stood.

"Captain, I want you and Dawson in the car with me. Let your friends follow in the other."

Two tonneau doors closed with bangs. Off whizzed the cars. Speed laws did not appear to be made for the concern of a man like Joseph Baldwin. It seemed as though the cars had barely started when they ran out onto a dock not much to the westward of the ferry houses.

A man in plain blue uniform and visored cap, wearing the insignia of a quartermaster, stood at the far end of the dock. He saluted as soon as he espied Joseph Baldwin hastening toward him.

"I see you're on time, Bickson."

"Yes, sir."

By this time Mr. Baldwin was going down a short flight of steps to a landing stage. There lay moored a trim-looking sixteen-foot power tender.

"Fall aboard," briefly directed Mr. Baldwin, and the motor boat boys, rather enjoying this systematized bustle, obeyed.

Bickson, without waiting for orders, cast off, started the motor and sent the boat gliding out into the stream.

"Quite a motor yacht that carries a quartermaster," observed Captain Halstead, with a smile.

"I carry three," rejoined Mr. Baldwin, thrusting a cigar into his mouth and lighting it with a "blazer" match.

In and out among the shipping the tender glided. Then, at last, Captain Tom caught sight of a graceful craft some hundred and twenty feet long. She looked like a miniature liner.

"I wonder if I'll ever command a handsome craft like that?" thought the young motor boat

skipper, with a brief pang of envy. "Jove! what a boat!"

The next thing the motor boat boys knew they were running up alongside this hundred-and-twenty-footer. A young man of twenty-five or twenty-six, whose uniform proclaimed him to be a watch officer, stood at the top of a side gangway.

"This can't be the boat—such a beauty!" gasped Tom Halstead, inwardly. Joe Dawson's eyes were full of wonder. Ab Perkins's lower jaw was hanging down in proof of his bewilderment. Dick Davis's face was flushing. Jed was staring. Only Jeff Randolph appeared indifferent.

"How do you do, Mr. Costigan?" hailed Mr. Baldwin, leading the way up the side gangway. "Mr. Costigan, pay your respects to the new captain of the 'Panther.' Captain Halstead, Mr. Costigan, your third officer."

If Mr. Costigan appeared astonished, Tom Halstead did not look less so. That he was really to command this big, handsome craft seemed to Tom like a dream. A moment before, when he had realized that the "Panther" was Mr. Baldwin's craft, the most the Maine boy had expected was that he and his companions would be allowed to stand watch in the engine room and on the bridge. But—captain!

Third Officer Costigan, however, saluted in a most proper manner. Tom held out his hand cordially.

“Presently, Mr. Costigan, I shall ask you to show me about this craft.”

“At your orders, sir,” replied Costigan, again saluting his commanding officer, then making his way forward.

“Here’s the captain’s cabin. I have the key,” announced Mr. Baldwin, leading the way to a door immediately aft of the pilot house. The owner unlocked the door, then led the way inside. Again Captain Tom wondered if he could be dreaming. Though everything was compact in this stateroom, yet all the conveniences were there, too. There was a double bed, a wardrobe locker, running water, two easy chairs, a desk, and a table just under a well-stocked China and glass cupboard.

“Your stateroom runs right through the deck-house from starboard to port,” explained Mr. Baldwin, who now appeared less pressed for time. “Bathroom and chart-room open out of this cabin aft. I think, Captain, you will be comfortable.”

“Comfortable!” murmured Tom, then smiled in sheer delight.

The other motor boat boys stood about the doorway, not offering to enter while the owner

was there. Mr. Baldwin dropped into one of the arm chairs.

"Now, Captain, I'll tell you what we have aboard," continued the owner. "Costigan is third officer. He's a good fellow, and a capable sailor, but he has his limitations, and—well, I don't believe he'll ever be much more than a third officer. You'd better keep him in that grade—unless you find he's better than some of your comrades. One good thing about Costigan is that he has a pilot's license for San Francisco Bay and the coast hereabouts. He's a good pilot, too. Another good thing about Costigan is that he's loyal, and a man who knows how to keep his tongue resting in the back of his mouth.

"Besides Costigan, there are three quarter-masters and seven men in the crew. We have also a cook and helper, a cabin steward and a men's steward. That's the whole outfit. We have no one, at present, in the engine-room department. You have men with you to fill out those positions, haven't you, Captain?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then let me see how you'll go to work to place them," shot out Mr. Baldwin, instantly.

"Mr. Perkins, first officer; Mr. Davis, second officer," replied Halstead, promptly. "Mr. Costigan, of course, third officer."

“And in the engine room?” pressed the owner.

“Mr. Dawson, chief engineer; Mr. Prentiss, first assistant; Mr. Randolph, second assistant engineer.”

“All right,” nodded Joseph Baldwin. “That makes our complement complete, I think. Now, Captain, publish your selections to the crew and take command. There’s the bell at the side of your desk.”

Hardly had Tom Halstead, still feeling as though in a trance, pressed the button, when a jauntily uniformed sailor appeared at the doorway, saluting.

“My compliments to Mr. Costigan; ask him to come here,” ordered Tom.

From the speed with which he reported, Third Officer Costigan must have been awaiting the summons.

“Pipe the crew forward of the pilot house, Mr. Costigan. All hands. I’ve something to say to them.”

The third officer’s whistle rang out shrilly forward. A few moments later Captain Halstead was notified that all hands were on deck.

Tom thereupon went forward, accompanied by the new officers of the “Panther,” who were proclaimed to the crew, including even the stewards and cooks.

“And I now invite the officers to my cabin,” said Captain Halstead as he wound up his harangue to the men. “The details of the deck and engine room watches will be decided at once.”

This was soon done. Following the practice that now obtains on many yachts, the watches were made eight hours long, instead of four. This enabled each member of a watch to get a full sleep between watches. In ordinary weather neither the captain nor first officer stands watch. The captain's, or starboard, watch was to be taken by Dick Davis as second officer. Mr. Costigan, third officer, was to stand the first officer's, or port, watch. Joe Dawson, as chief engineer, was generally responsible for the engineering department, but stood no watch in the engine room, the starboard watch at the motors falling to Jed Prentiss, and the port watch to Jeff Randolph. Bickson, as chief quartermaster, was made responsible for the general policing of the craft, the other two quartermasters taking watch trick at the wheel in the pilot house.

During the making of these arrangements Mr. Baldwin had strolled aft to his own suite of rooms. These, immediately aft of the chart room, consisted of parlor, bed-room and bath. Aft of these quarters lay the deck dining room, from which a staircase led down to the cabin

proper. Off the cabin were eight handsome staterooms for the owner's guests.

All this Tom and his comrades saw as Costigan piloted them over this superb yacht.

Forward of the main cabin, below, was the chief engineer's stateroom, which Joe would occupy by himself. In Joe's room, also, was service for the chief engineer's meals.

Then there was a stateroom for the second and third officers, and another for the engineer's two assistants. For these junior officers, and Mr. Costigan, there was an officers' mess. Further forward was the crew's mess, then the kitchen department. Ahead of this was the engine room, with the crew's forecabin quarters right up in the bow of the craft, below decks.

"You see, sir," explained Mr. Costigan, "there's everything that could be thought of for the comfort of officers and crew."

"It's the most compact boat I could imagine," declared Captain Tom, enthusiastically.

"You may well say that, sir."

They passed on to inspect the engine room. Joe's eyes fairly gleamed as he inspected the twin motors, the dynamos and all the other details of his own department. It was a finer engine room than Joe Dawson had hoped to command for many years to come. He remained below, with his assistants, to inspect their new domain,

while Tom, Ab and Dick returned to the deck with Mr. Costigan.

The "Panther" was schooner rigged, with a full set of sails for each of the two masts. There was a short bowsprit, carrying two jibs.

"This craft does pretty well under sail, sir," declared the third officer.

"She looks as though she ought to," replied Captain Tom. "But what gait does she make with her power alone?"

"She's been running, cruising, sir, at about twelve to fourteen miles an hour. She's listed as a twenty-two mile boat at her best, but I believe, sir, that a good engineer could get twenty-four out of her."

"The new chief engineer is one who can get out any speed that the motors will stand."

"He looks it, sir."

Halstead was careful always to use the word "Mister." Watch officers and engineers, who are also officers, are always addressed in that way, by the captain, or even by the owner. Costigan was equally careful to say "sir," when addressing any officer of grade above his own.

"When you can spare the time, Captain, I'll have a few words with you," called Mr. Baldwin, showing his head through the starboard doorway of his suite.

"At once, sir," replied Captain Tom, turn-

ing and going to the owner's door. At the threshold the new captain of the "Panther" halted.

"Come right in, Captain. Take a chair," invited the owner. "Now, then, what do you think of your new task?"

"I'm astounded, sir. Overjoyed, too," Tom replied, with a candid smile.

"Why?"

"Well, sir, this craft represents the height of my dreams. The 'Panther' is twice the length and about four times the total size of any boat I've ever commanded before."

"Are you afraid it's too big an undertaking for you?" asked Mr. Baldwin, regarding his young sailing master keenly.

"No, sir!" came the prompt answer.

"Hm! I'm glad of that. But I wasn't worrying. I've known Delavan a long time. I told him what I wanted, and knew I could bank on his choice. Are all your friends satisfied?"

"They're delighted," Tom nodded. "All they're aching for now, sir, is to get out on the first cruise."

"They'll have their wish this evening," laughed Mr. Baldwin. "Is there anything you want to ask me, Captain?"

"Nothing, unless you'll permit me to be a bit curious."

"That's a bad fault on this yacht," replied Joseph Baldwin, with a slight frown that quickly disappeared. "What is it you want to know?"

"I'm wondering, sir, why you had to send all the way east for officers for the 'Panther'?"

"Because I've had to get rid of two sets of officers," replied Mr. Baldwin, crisply. "One captain was too inquisitive, the other was incapable. Then I began to hear a good deal about your famous Motor Boat Club. That set me to corresponding with Delavan. He told me a lot more about you young men, and I couldn't get it out of my head that *you* were the sort of people I wanted."

"You weren't afraid on account of our being so—well, youthful?"

"I knew, if you'd suit Frank Delavan, you'd suit me. And I'm just as sure after having seen you all. Now, Captain Halstead, you'll be ready to sail at any time after seven this evening. That is the hour when my guests and I sit down to dinner aboard. At the time I'll give you your general sailing instructions. Remember, Mr. Costigan must be your pilot until you're out through the Golden Gate and clear of the coast."

"Yes, sir," assented Halstead, rising. "Any further orders, sir?"

"That is all, for the present, Captain."

Tom Halstead left the owner's suite and

walked forward, filled with a wonderful sense of elation. He passed the pilot house just in time to see Joe Dawson coming up forward.

"Say, are we going to wake up, chum?" breathed young Dawson in his friend's ear.

"I don't believe we'll have to," laughed the young skipper, happily. "We're all right, I'm pretty sure, if we don't do something that greatly displeases the boat's owner. Thanks to Mr. Delavan, the owner of this craft is willing to believe, at the start, that we're all that's good and wonderful. But come into my cabin, old fellow, if you have the time. We'll dine together tonight."

Both motor boat boys sighed their supreme contentment as they dropped into arm-chairs facing each other. It was now so dark that Tom switched on the electric lights.

"How are the engines, Joe?" asked Tom, dropping into his old, friendly manner.

"Ready to start at a second's notice. And Jed's on duty there, waiting for the word."

"Gasoline?"

"Tanks bulging with it. Tom, this is a beautifully appointed boat below, and every store of every description is in place."

"That's the kind of a man I'm pretty sure Mr. Baldwin is," nodded Halstead.

Joe surveyed a row of speaking tubes that

hung against the forward wall of the captain's room. He picked out one labeled "engine-room," pressing the button beneath it.

"Hello, sir," came the quick response, in Jed Prentiss's unmistakable tones.

"Hello, Mr. Prentiss," Joe returned. "How do you like it down there, on duty?"

"It's perfect!" responded Jed, almost dreamily. "Everything here but my own personal steward. I ain't sure but what *he'll* blow in, in a minute, and ask me what I'll have for dinner."

"Tell him we're scheduled to start at seven," suggested Halstead.

"I can start in seven seconds, if I'm asked to," promised Prentiss. "Anyway, I can have the propellers turning fast before you can get the anchor up. Crackey! I forgot that I have to supply even the power for hoisting anchor."

Twenty minutes later the two chums, who had begun their career by patching up an old steam launch down at the mouth of the Kennebec River, in Maine, were seated at table in the captain's cabin, doing justice to a meal that was but little short of sumptuous.

The chief steward himself, a man named Parkinson, served the young captain and chief engineer. He hovered about, as attentive as any hotel waiter or private butler could have been.

It was the second steward, however, who came

in with the dessert for the two chief officers of the "Panther."

"What has become of the other steward?" inquired the young captain.

"Time for him, sir, to put on the finishing touches in the dining saloon," replied Collins, the second steward, who served also the junior officers and the crew.

"If we eat like this at every meal, Joe," sighed Halstead, contentedly, when the second steward had removed the last of the things, "we'll have to devote all the rest of the time to exercising off extra flesh. Let's get out on deck."

"All right. But I mean to be in the engine-room when the start is made."

At the side gangway the chums stepped quickly past, to make way for half a dozen men who were coming up over the side, while Mr. Costigan stood respectfully by to receive them. They were guests of the owner just coming on board for the night's cruise. One of these newcomers went directly to Mr. Baldwin's suite.

"Owner's compliments, sir," called Parkinson, softly, as he came hurrying after the young sailing master. "Mr. Baldwin wishes to see Captain Halstead on the jump, sir."

The call had come for the brisk beginning of the strangest duties in which young Halstead had ever been employed.

CHAPTER IV

HALSTEAD IS LET INTO A SECRET

“CAPTAIN HALSTEAD, my friend, Mr. Jason Ross,” announced Mr. Baldwin, crisply, as soon as the young skipper had closed the owner’s door behind him.

Mr. Ross was a man of forty-five, and looked like a man who might be of much importance in the financial world. Yet *he* was presented to Halstead, for on a yacht the captain is considered next in importance to the owner.

Tom modestly greeted Mr. Ross.

“Sit down, Captain,” snapped out the owner, though not unkindly. “Now, I’ve got to take you into my confidence a bit. Delavan’s word for you makes me feel that I can safely do it.”

Tom had only time to nod ere Mr. Baldwin went on, crisply:

“My guests are on board, with one exception. In a way, the exception is the most important one of us all. He isn’t so very important in himself, but Gaston Giddings, though a very weak, foolish young man, happened to succeed his father in the principal control and presidency of the Sheepmen’s National Bank. Young Giddings and the funds his bank can sup-

ply are of the utmost importance to my associates and myself in some big enterprises we are putting through. Do I make myself clear?"

"Wholly so, sir," Tom answered, quietly.

"Now, Giddings, besides being several kinds of plain and ornamental fool—no, I won't quite say that, but this weak young man has one fearful fault for the head of a bank——"

Joseph Baldwin paused in his rapid speech. He looked sharply at Mr. Ross an instant, then continued:

"Oh, well, Frank Delavan told me I could trust you and Dawson with anything from my yacht to my reputation. You understand that what I'm telling you, Captain, is absolutely confidential?"

"Of course, sir," responded Tom, quietly.

"Well, then, within the last three months young Giddings has, in some way we can't understand, fallen a victim to the opium habit. The young man is all but totally wrecked by the vile drug. How, or why, he started, none of us can understand. You see, a good many of us older men, who were fast friends of his father, have tried to stand by the young man. Two of to-night's party are directors in the Sheepmen's Bank. We've tried to get the bank's funds placed in interests that we control, so that young Giddings couldn't go very far wrong, by not

having enough money left in his charge to wreck the bank. You follow me?"

"I—I think so, Mr. Baldwin."

"Truth to tell," pursued the owner, "I had planned—my friends on board with me—to go out ostensibly for one night, but really to be gone for several days. One of our friends is a specialist in the opium habit—Dr. Gray. We had hoped, on this trip, to plan some financial enterprises that would use up, for the present, the dangerously large balance at the Sheepmen's Bank. At the same time we were going to try to force young Giddings to agree to heroic medical treatment in order to overcome his fearful vice."

Tom Halstead remained silent, but attentive.

"Now, at the last moment," pursued Mr. Baldwin, "we hear that Giddings was seen in a closed carriage, evidently headed for Chinatown, that vile Oriental section of San Francisco, where the opium vice flourishes at its worst. And in Chinatown a man can disappear so completely that his friends can't find him again in years. Giddings was to be here to-night, but he's in a Chinatown opium den instead. If we appeal to the police, it'll all be in the newspapers. There'll be a scandal that will disgrace Giddings forever, start a run on the Sheepmen's Bank, and—though this is the least of our worries—

will delay for some time the pushing of the big financial game in which my friends and myself are interested. Now, we've got to find some way of getting at Giddings, and of bringing him on board without trouble or noise. I've told you this much, Captain Halstead, so that you'll understand the need of secrecy. If we can find Giddings, and get him out here, then we *must* bring him over the side and get him into his stateroom without his being seen by any of the crew on board, except, possibly, by one or two of your own comrades whom you think you can best trust."

"I can trust every one of 'em, sir," declared Captain Tom, promptly. "So will you, when you know them better."

"Then, Captain, before we make any move to find Giddings in his Chinatown hiding-place, and attempt to get him aboard this yacht, we must have all of the crew safely out of the way, save for your own personal friends among the officers."

"I can plan for the crew to go ashore," declared Tom Halstead. "I have only to state that you've decided to delay putting out to sea, and that you've been good enough to grant the men a night on shore at the theatre at your expense. That will take every one of them over the side. Do you want Mr. Costigan to go?"

"Why, I think Costigan is all right, but he isn't needed here, anyway, so he'd better go ashore also."

"Easily settled, then, Mr. Baldwin. I can send Mr. Costigan off in charge of the shore party. At what hour do you wish them all to return, sir?"

"Not a minute before midnight!"

"Very good, sir. I can tell Mr. Costigan that you've been called ashore, that you will dine there, and that you are very glad of this opportunity to give the older members of the crew a chance to enjoy themselves ashore."

"Excellent, indeed!" cried Mr. Baldwin, in a low tone. "What do you say, Ross?"

"If Captain Halstead can vouch so heartily for the silence and discretion of his own friends, then the plan ought to clear the decks so that we can get Giddings aboard—if we find him—without any comment or scandal at all," agreed Jason Ross.

Joseph Baldwin employed himself stripping a few banknotes from a roll that he drew from a trousers pocket.

"Give this money to Mr. Costigan, Captain, and tell him to see to it that the men have a good time on shore—though no drunkenness! And you, Captain Halstead, I trust to see to it that none but your own friends remain aboard."

Ten minutes later Captain Tom returned to the owner's suite to report that Third Officer Costigan and the crew, including the stewards and cooks, had gone ashore in the tender, Jeff Randolph running the boat in.

"How soon will Randolph be back?" asked Mr. Baldwin.

"Within ten minutes, sir."

"Then I shall want him to put Mr. Ross and myself ashore. We two must take up the seemingly impossible task of locating young Giddings in the heart of Chinatown's slums, and bring him here by force, yet without noise. Once we get him on board, and below, we can keep the young man quiet until morning, when we'll be well out on the ocean. Dr. Gray will attend to that."

"Are your friends going to remain on board, without dinner?" asked Halstead.

"No; they can go ashore and get dinner at a restaurant, returning presently. Mr. Randolph can keep the tender at the landing stage until they return. Then, as soon as he has brought our other friends aboard, Mr. Randolph can return for Ross and myself, when we get back. But Mr. Randolph must not let Costigan or the crew get aboard until after we've returned."

"I'll make his instructions clear on that point," nodded Tom.

"That is all, then. Let me know when the tender returns."

"Hold on, a moment, Baldwin," interposed Mr. Ross.

"Well?"

"Baldwin, neither of us is in what might be called the pink of condition, and young Giddings may put up a fight in his half-crazed way. Don't we need a little real brawn with us?"

"Taking Captain Halstead with us, do you mean?"

"That was the idea that had come into my head," nodded Mr. Ross.

"Yes; it would be an excellent idea. Captain, you will go with us. Leave your first officer in command here until we return."

"Very good, sir."

Tom Halstead saluted, then withdrew. He gave his orders quickly, not deeming it necessary to mention any phase of the story of young Gaston Giddings to his comrades of the Motor Boat Club.

As soon as the launch was alongside Tom hastened to inform Mr. Baldwin. The entire party thereupon came out on deck, gathering at the side gangway. They speedily embarked in the tender, in which Jeff sat where he could handle both engine and steering gear.

"Your instructions are clear, Mr. Perkins?" called Tom Halstead, softly, from the launch.

"Quite clear, sir," Ab replied. "The instructions will be followed to the letter."

"Shove off, then," Tom commanded. "To the landing stage, Mr. Randolph."

It would have been almost laughable, to anyone who had witnessed the frolicsome motor boat boys going through their hazing affair of the forenoon, had he now been at hand to hear them using the stately "mister" and "sir" with all the gravity of naval officers.

Jeff speedily had the party ashore.

Twenty minutes later a closed cab rolled slowly in at one corner of gayly-lighted, malodorous Chinatown. The vehicle contained Messrs. Baldwin and Ross and young Captain Tom Halstead. In this poisonous atmosphere they sought a young human wreck, Gaston Giddings.

CHAPTER V

A HUNT IN THE UNDER-WORLD

DURING the ride from the water front Captain Tom Halstead had sat on the front seat of the cab, quiet and reserved.

Now, as they entered the outer confines of Chinatown, Halstead leaned slightly forward,

peering out at the shops and at the queer Oriental jumble, mixed here and there with white people, that thronged the narrow sidewalks.

"Are you headed for any particular place, sir?" queried the young skipper, after a few moments.

"No," admitted Mr. Baldwin. "I know nothing of Chinatown. We must drive through, first of all, at a venture. Presently an idea may come to us. Whatever we do, our plans must soon be formed. If I dared speak to a police officer—but the risk is too great."

"There's a restaurant," murmured the boy, suddenly. "It looks like a big and clean place. Why don't you and Mr. Ross slip in there, have some tea or something, and let me prowl about in these queer, crooked streets for a few minutes? Chinatown is only a few blocks in extent, I understand. I may be able to learn something that way, unless you have a better plan, sir."

"I am afraid you'll run into danger, alone in this barbarous crowd," objected Mr. Baldwin.

"I'm not in the least afraid," smiled Tom, confidently. "Two prosperous looking men like you might attract attention, but, as for me, the people hereabouts will think only that I'm some young sailor ashore for a lark. Shall I stop the cab, sir?"

"Yes," agreed Joseph Baldwin, though he spoke doubtfully.

Tom's hand shot up at once, grabbing the check string. The driver pulled up his horses, then came to the door, opening it.

"This will be as good a place for you to remain, driver, as anywhere," said Halstead, as he stepped out. Then he turned, waiting for Messrs. Baldwin and Ross to alight.

"Shall I find you in that restaurant, sir?" the young skipper inquired.

"Yes; but don't be too long away, Halstead, or we shall be more uneasy than ever."

"Trust a sailor to take care of himself in any crowd, sir," laughed Tom Halstead, jauntily. With that he stepped off, at a more rolling gait than he usually employed on shore.

The young motor boat captain carried in his mind a good personal description of Gaston Giddings. He had secured this from Mr. Baldwin before leaving the yacht.

"Ugh! The smell here is worse than in New York's Chinatown," Tom told himself, disgustingly.

From upper windows of some of the buildings that lined the narrow, dirty streets came the squawkings of Chinese fiddles and other discordant "musical" instruments of a wholly Oriental type. There seemed to be two or three

joss-houses, or temples, in every short block. On the street floors, however, stores offering all kinds of Chinese merchandise were most common. Tom suspected that the gambling places and opium joints lay in the rear of these stores.

"Want a guide to Chinatown? Show ye everything, boss, for two dollars. Show ye every real sight in Chinatown," appealed a seedy, dirty, young white man who now held Tom by one sleeve.

"Anything really worth seeing?" asked Halstead, smilingly.

"Oh, *everything* worth seeing," responded the seedy guide, with a wide wave of one arm. "Best two dollars' worth you ever had. Most curious sights you ever saw in any part of the world. Sailor, ain't ye?"

"Yes."

"Sailors are my specialty," declared the seedy guide, grimly. "Come, ye'd better haul up the two dollars and let me take you about."

"What about opium joints, for instance?" asked Tom Halstead, speaking as though he had not enthused much as yet.

"I know 'em all," asserted the seedy guide, eagerly. "Want to smoke the opium pipe?"

"Can't say," replied Tom, vaguely. "Yet, if I do go around with you, you've got to take me to the really swell opium places."

"Oh, I can do it—better'n any other guide in Chinatown," promised the fellow, quickly. "Come, just hand over the two dollars, and see what I can show you."

With a great pretense of reluctance Captain Tom produced four half dollars, which he handed to the guide.

"Remember, now," he said, "I want what you might call the artistocratic places."

"If ye ain't satisfied," promised the guide, glibly, "then ye'll get your money back."

"Go ahead, then, but mind what I told you."

Through dark alleyways, or through stores into rear apartments, Halstead followed his conductor. In rapid succession he passed in and out of half a dozen opium joints. One was as much like another as two kernels of wheat resemble each other.

In each place there was the same outer room, then the same bunk-room, an apartment fitted up with bunks at the sides. It was in these rooms that the smoking was done. The intending smoker stretched himself out in a bunk, while a Chinese attendant brought lamp and kit. A tiny ball of opium was quickly lighted—"cooked"—at the lamp's flame. Then this glowing pellet of opium was thrust into the bowl of an opium pipe, and the latter handed to the smoker in the bunk. The smoker con-

sumed his pellet after two or three whiffs. After smoking three or four pipes, most of the smokers succumbed, falling back in a torpid sleep.

The air was heavy, disgusting in these places. Degraded white men and women were occasionally to be seen, though most of the smokers were Orientals, generally Chinese.

Heart-sick and dizzy, Tom Halstead still kept on, though, whenever he reached outer air, he took pains to inflate his lungs several times before again entering one of the wretched, squalid "joints."

Off the bunk-rooms several of these dens had "private" sleeping apartments, for white smokers who desired more privacy. Wherever he noted doors to such private rooms Tom Halstead thrust them open, glancing inside. Nor was his conduct resented. The opium smokers were too far gone to show or feel anger.

"You haven't shown me any very swell places yet," protested the young skipper, after leaving the seventh place.

The guide, a thin, undersized, slovenly man in his early thirties, turned to look the motor boat boy over keenly.

Tom noticed that the fellow's eyes had a look in them much like the look in the eyes of several of the smokers they had just seen.

"This fellow is an opium-user himself," decided Tom Halstead.

"Say, young feller," remarked the guide, in a cautious undertone, "you're looking for *someone*."

"Perhaps I am," the young skipper half admitted.

"Who is he?"

"No matter. But do you know any of the men who come here to Chinatown often to use the pipe?"

"Say, if there's any white hop-fiend that I don't know, then he's a brand-new one," rejoined the guide.

"Do you know a young man of twenty-four or five, about five-eight tall, dark, slim, rather fine-looking, smooth faced and with a slight scar under his right ear?"

"I guess that must be young Doc Gaston," whispered the guide.

Gaston? That was Giddings's first name. Tom Halstead started, though he strove to conceal his excitement.

"Where does Doc Gaston go?" he demanded.

"What'll you pay to find out?" insisted the guide, cunningly.

"Ten dollars."

"Make it fifty, and I'll do it for you."

Tom, however, stuck to his original price,

though three or four minutes were lost in haggling.

"Ten dollars is the highest price," Tom declared, flatly. "That pays you for standing by me until I get Doc Gaston—if he's the one I'm looking for—outside of Chinatown."

"Well, gimme the money now, then," demanded the guide.

"Oh, no," retorted the young skipper, tartly. "You get the money after we're through and on the edge of Chinatown in a cab. Now, don't haggle any more, or I'll drop the matter altogether. Are you going to take my offer, or not?"

"Say, you'll sure pay the ten, will ye?" whined the fellow.

"As sure as there's a sky above us."

"Then come along."

"Where's the place?" questioned Tom Halstead.

"Around the next corner."

"Do you know where Yum Kee's restaurant is?"

"O' course. They call Yum Kee the Chinatown Delmonico."

"Lead me back there, then, and we'll get the carriage."

Tom Halstead had been around so many corners in this crowded, complex quarter of San

Francisco that he had lost his bearings. The guide, however, piloted him back to the waiting cab within two minutes.

First of all, however, the young skipper peered in at the restaurant. Messrs. Baldwin and Ross were at one of the rear tables, eating.

"Tell the driver where to go, now, and we'll make the start," Tom instructed the guide. Soon afterwards they alighted before a brightly-lighted Chinese grocery store. Besides the proprietor, there were three or four clerks and a dozen yellow-skinned, pig-tailed customers in the place. The guide, with an air of being at home here, led the way straight back, pushing ajar a door at the rear. The instant they entered this rear compartment the sickening odor of sizzling opium greeted Captain Tom's nostrils. This proved to be the inevitable outer room, but the guide led into the adjoining bunk-room. In this latter apartment were half a dozen doors.

"Just look through 'em," whispered the guide. "Don't talk to me none. Remember, if there's a row here, I've got to make up a yarn that will square things for me."

Two of the private rooms into which Halstead boldly intruded proved to be empty.

In the third room a weazened little old Chinaman crouched over a lamp and a tray holding

an outfit. He was preparing to remove these things. In the bunk, sprawled out, with glassy eyes, was a young man whom Tom Halstead recognized in a flash—weak, vice-ridden Gaston Giddings!

CHAPTER VI

FACING THE YELLOW BARRIER

“**M**AYBE what you likee here?” demanded the little old Chinaman, looking up with a snarl.

“Looking around,” retorted Tom, grimly.

“Allee same—*git!*”

The guide had approached, taking a swift, shifty look in at the bunk.

“That’s Doc Gaston, isn’t it?” whispered Tom, over his shoulder.

“Don’t ye know him?” queried the guide, suspiciously.

“He looks strange, with that glassy look in his eyes.”

“That’s Doc Gaston, all right. ‘Least, that’s what he calls himself in Chinatown.”

“You allee same *git*—chop-chop,” snarled the Chinaman, savagely. He had put the smoking outfit on the floor once more, and now pushed against the motor boat boy with both hands, trying to force him from the room.

Tom, however, coolly and gravely picked the short Chinaman up off his feet, wheeled and put him down again on the floor of the bunkroom beyond.

"Now, shove off!" ordered Halstead, half gruffly. "Don't bother me again."

After flashing an ugly look at the motor boat boy, the Chinaman fled in the direction of the store.

"Now, whatcher going to do?" demanded the guide, nervously.

"If I can't get young Gaston to walking on his own feet, then I'm going to pick him up in my arms and carry him out to the carriage," answered Tom Halstead, firmly.

"Smoking joss-house!" gasped the guide. "D'ye know what'll happen? There'll be a house-full of them chinks down on us! Hatchet men—gun men—say, young feller, dontcher know that these here hop-joints are protected by the highbinders?"

Tom Halstead had heard of the Chinese highbinders in New York. He knew of them as a desperate crowd of yellow-skinned thugs. The guide's own terror was too real to be feigned.

"If you're afraid of this kind of a job, what did you come here for?" asked the young skipper, quickly, gruffly.

"Why, I thought ye was goin' to try to *coax*

the young Doc out. But, say—taking him out by force—lemme get outer this on the jump!”

“No, you don’t,” roared Tom Halstead, with swift and quite unlooked-for energy. “Stand by, now!”

He gripped the guide by the arm, fairly forcing him over to the bunk in which the young opium smoker lay. Giddings, if it was really he, lay open-eyed, yet unheeding.

“Come, get up!” ordered the boy, reaching with both hands under the opium smoker’s shoulders and raising him. “Out on your feet!”

A drowsy, unintelligible protest came from the stranger. But Tom fairly lifted him out onto his feet, then threw a strong, supporting arm about him.

“Now, walk! Come along!” ordered Halstead, briskly, taking hold of the young man with his other hand.

“Sufferin’ joss-sticks!” wailed the guide. “Here come the chinks—number-one man and all!”

The door of the bunkroom burst open. Through the doorway rapidly advanced the gorgeously-dressed Chinaman whom Tom had supposed to be the proprietor of the store beyond. Back of him came four plainly-attired Chinamen with as hard-looking, evil faces as

could be found in all Chinatown's quagmire of vice.

"This ain't my doings, Ling!" wailed the guide, quailing before the stern glances of the yellow leader—the "number-one man." "I told this young fellow he'd have to quit. Let us out."

"Yes; let us out!" repeated Tom Halstead, staring undauntedly into the eyes of Ling.

"Put him down," ordered Ling, nodding scowlingly at the stranger whom Halstead supported. "Then, maybe, we see what we do with you."

The air was full of danger of the most awesome kind. Though not a weapon showed, as yet, each of the four Chinese behind the proprietor stood with his hands thrust up into his sleeves. A Chinaman always carries his weapons up his sleeves, whence he can bring them down, into action, with incredible rapidity.

"Now, don't think you've got me frightened," uttered Tom Halstead, sturdily, gazing undauntedly at the Chinese. "There isn't any scare in me when I'm dealing with people like you. If you make one single false move you'll be the ones who'll be sorry for it. Ling, I'm going to take this young man out of here. His friends know where he is, and they've sent me

here to get him. I'm going to take him out of here, chop-chop. If I'm not out of here in another minute or so, then this young man's friends will bring down police enough on you to clean the place out."

Ling laughed contemptuously.

"Oh, you may think you have money enough, and 'pull' enough, to keep the police from troubling you," jeered young Halstead. "But, if this young man's friends get after you, it'll make a noise that the police can't shut their ears to."

Two of the men behind Ling stood blocking the doorway. The other two, by now, were edging around to get on either side of the unflinching boy.

"You yellow scoundrels, get back, and stay back!" commanded Tom, glaring at them sternly.

There comes into notice, now and then, a man who has enough of the magnetic quality of bravery to hold a mob back. Tom Halstead was possessed of the grit needed for such an undertaking.

"Get out of the way, Ling—you and your heathen hatchet men," commanded the young skipper, resolutely. "I'm going past you. If I find any fellow in my way I'll knock him down. If you fight back, it'll be the finish of



“Gangway, You Yellow Idiots.”



you and of this place. *Gangway, you yellow idiots!*”

Still supporting, half dragging, the dazed young banker, Tom Halstead grittily pressed his way to the doorway and through it. One of Ling's henchmen attempted to stand immovable, but Halstead, with a quick blow of his open hand, sent the fellow stumbling backward.

“If you're thinking of creeping up behind me, don't try it,” advised Halstead, as coolly as ever, as he started across the outer room.

He gained the closed door connecting with the outer store. Pausing here, a moment, he beheld two of Ling's yellow-visaged fellows creeping toward him.

“Back for yours—that'll keep you out of trouble,” barked the young skipper, coolly, without raising a hand to defend himself. Then he threw the door open, calling backward over his shoulder:

“Don't you dare let this young man in here again, Ling. If you do, it'll wind you up.”

With that the motor boat boy contrived to pilot his charge swiftly through the store. He was not safe until he had passed the last of these yellow men, and the young skipper knew it. Yet, at last, he had the stranger out on the sidewalk, one hand up to signal the driver of the cab.

The guide, keeping close to the motor boat boy, had managed to get out with him. But the little fellow was shaking as though seized with the ague.

"Get into the cab, and help me take the young man in," ordered Tom, and the guide was glad, indeed, to dive inside the carriage. In another moment they were driving away.

"Say, but you've got the nerve!" chattered the guide, his teeth knocking together.

"Maybe you'd have some nerve if you'd learn to leave hop alone," rejoined Halstead. "Hop" is the Chinatown name for opium.

Halstead sat on the rear seat, supporting the young banker beside him. In a little while the cab again halted in front of Yum Kee's restaurant.

"Here," said Halstead, producing a ten-dollar bill. "Take this. Skip as soon as you like."

"You oughter gimme more," whined the guide.

"I've given you all I agreed. No use trying to get any more."

The guide, thereupon, sprang out, vanishing within a few seconds. Going to the doorway of the restaurant, yet standing where he could keep a close watch on the cab, Tom uttered a long, low whistle. Messrs. Baldwin and Ross

saw him instantly, and came hastening out. By the time they reached the cab the young skipper was inside again.

"Is this your young man?" asked Halstead, almost in a whisper.

"Yes," nodded Baldwin, a jubilant gleam showing in his eyes.

"Better jump in, then, sir, so we can get away quickly."

Gaston Giddings now leaned against Tom's shoulder, sleeping the sleep of drugged stupefaction.

"How on earth did you find him so soon?" questioned Joseph Baldwin, leaning forward when the cab had gone beyond the confines of Chinatown. Tom told the whole story, simply and modestly.

"Young man," uttered Jason Ross, solemnly, "I don't believe you have any idea, yet, of how huge a risk you ran yourself into. The Chinese criminal is desperate at all times, but ten-fold more so when he's on his own ground, surrounded only by his own crowd."

"Well, I got out, didn't I?" smiled the young skipper, coolly.

"Yes; but I marvel at it."

"I understand more and more why Delavan recommended these youngsters to me," breathed Joseph Baldwin, gleefully. "'Ready

for anything,' he told me, was the motto of the Motor Boat Club boys."

When the cab rolled out onto the dock Jeff Randolph was found pacing back and forth on the landing stage. No other member of the crew was in sight, and Jeff stated that none of the others of Mr. Baldwin's party of guests had yet returned.

Gaston Giddings, still unaware of his surroundings, was helped aboard the tender. A swift trip was made to the "Panther," and the unfortunate young man was immediately carried below to be put to bed in one of the stateroom berths.

Half an hour later Mr. Baldwin's other guests returned from dinner. Jeff, who had gone back to meet them, brought them on board, next going back to await the arrival of Third Officer Costigan and the crew. Dr. Gray hastened below, to attend to Giddings, and to keep him quiet, also, after the crew should come on board.

As for Captain Tom, after receiving Ab Perkins's report that all was well aboard, he went to his own cabin, calling Joe Dawson, through the speaking tube, to join him. Here Joseph Baldwin found both youngsters.

"Captain Halstead, how much did you spend on my account, to-night?" asked the owner.

"Altogether, sir, twelve dollars on the guide."

"Never mind about any change, then," rejoined Mr. Baldwin, passing over a bank note.

"I think I can make change for that, sir," retorted Skipper Tom, his color rising. "I'm not out after 'tips,' you know, sir," he added, with a smile.

Producing a roll of money from an inner pocket, Halstead counted out eighty-eight dollars, which he handed to the owner.

"You may refuse, now, but I shall be even with you later," remarked Joseph Baldwin. "And now, Captain, as soon as you can, after the crew comes aboard, I want you to put out to sea. I'll give you more explicit orders as soon as we're seven or eight miles west of the coast."

"Very good, sir," replied Captain Tom, saluting as the owner turned to leave the captain's cabin.

"You've been running into a bit more excitement, have you?" queried Joe, smiling.

"A bit," laughed Halstead. Dawson asked no further questions.

At a few minutes after midnight Mr. Costigan returned with his shore party.

"It's your watch below, Mr. Costigan, until eight o'clock in the morning," First Officer Ab

Perkins informed the third officer. "When you are called to turn out we'll be at sea."

"Very good, sir," replied Costigan, and went below to seek his berth. Neither the third officer nor any of the crew had any suspicion that anything unusual had happened this evening.

"Where's Mr. Costigan?" inquired Captain Halstead, coming forward.

"Gone below to sleep, sir," Ab replied.

"Then I'm afraid you'll have to rout him out. He'll have to stay on deck until he has piloted us through the Golden Gate. I want to be under way within five minutes."

Somewhat chagrined, Ab Perkins sent one of the crew below for the third officer. Costigan was speedily in evidence.

Now, one of the motors began to chug briskly below, and the two bow anchors came speedily up, being stowed by the watch. Joe was in the engine room with Jed Prentiss, while Captain Tom Halstead, feeling prouder and happier than ever in his life before, climbed to the bridge up behind the pilot house. After him went Dick Davis, whose watch it was to stand. Mr. Costigan, after seeing the anchors stowed, started for the bridge also.

"Give the engine room slow speed ahead, Mr. Davis," directed Tom.

Dick gave the bell-pull at the bridge rail the required jerk. The "Panther" began to move gracefully ahead, while Mr. Costigan, with the pilot-house speaking tube in his hand, called down the helmsman's orders.

"Dick, this is the real thing!" whispered Tom Halstead, jubilantly, in his comrade's ear while Costigan was busy at the speaking tube.

"It's as fine as bossing a liner," rejoined Dick Davis, enthusiastically.

"Better!" declared Halstead.

Dick presently signaled the engineer for more speed. The "Panther" ploughed through the waters of the bay, toward the Golden Gate.

As Tom Halstead peered through the night ahead he felt another ecstatic thrill. It was all so fine, so glorious! No doubt it was better for him, at this moment, that he could not foresee all that lay ahead of him.

CHAPTER VII

DICK TAKES THE RESCUE BOAT TRICK

IT wasn't long before First Officer Ab Perkins also climbed the stairs to the bridge.

"If this craft runs on the rocks, it won't be for want of officers at their post," laughed Skipper Tom, gleefully.

"I couldn't keep away," confessed Ab. "It's the first time in my life I've ever stood on a real bridge by right. Oh, but this is a different thing altogether from the tiny bridge-deck of a fifty-foot boat!"

Third Officer Costigan paid no heed to the motor boat boys. Though Costigan had never held higher rank than he now enjoyed, standing watch on a bridge was no new sensation for him. The young Irishman thought, mainly, of the time when he would have the "Panther" through the Gate and well off the coast. Then he could turn in below.

Presently a fifth person joined the little squad on the bridge. It was Joseph Baldwin.

"You've a clear night and an easy sea, Captain," smiled the owner. "It's a fortunate sort of start for you."

"Yes, sir."

"When you're well clear of the Gate, Captain, look in on me down in the main cabin, and I'll give you your sailing orders for the night."

"Yes, sir."

Halstead knew his own dignity on the bridge. He was on duty, and did not attempt to engage the owner in any conversation other than that which concerned his present duties. Mr. Baldwin went below just after the "Panther's" prow was turned into the beginning of the Golden

Gate, that magnificent approach to San Francisco harbor. The Gate is some two miles long, and nearly a mile wide, with an abundance of deep water for the passage of the largest craft afloat.

"What speed, sir?" asked Dick Davis.

"Ten miles is fast enough in this channel, isn't it, Mr. Costigan?" inquired the young captain.

"About as much as is best, sir."

Dick, at a sign from Halstead, communicated the order to the engine room. Twelve minutes later the "Panther" was clearing the Gate, leaving a track of foam behind her as Davis signaled for increased speed.

Joe, leaving his first assistant below at the motors, now joined the bridge squad.

"If there's nothing more, Captain," suggested Dawson, "I'll turn in below for the night."

Captain Halstead nodded. Soon afterwards he went below, to the main cabin.

"I've come to report for orders, Mr. Baldwin," he announced.

"They're simple enough," replied the owner. "Clear the coast by some twenty miles; then cruise south, at not too great speed—say, about twelve miles an hour."

"Do these orders hold until changed, sir?"

"Yes, Captain."

Tom saluted, then turned as though to leave the cabin, but Mr. Baldwin called him back.

“You’re not needed on the bridge yet, Captain. . . Remain with us a little while, if you feel like it. You can see that Dr. Gray is keeping his own watch down here in the main cabin.”

At that moment the physician, an elderly man, stepped out of a stateroom, closing the door after him.

“There! My patient will sleep for some hours, I think. I’ll take the upper berth in his room to-night, so that I can hear him and attend to him if he wakes. Ah, good evening, Captain. Or is it good morning? I have been told of your fine work—on land, at that.”

“Is Giddings going to be in anything like his right mind when he wakes?” asked Mr. Baldwin.

“Oh, in a general way, I think he’ll know what he’s saying,” replied the physician. “But he won’t be at all bright before thirty-six hours have passed. Even then I can’t guarantee him. Opium drives him to the verge of mania.”

When several of the others had engaged in conversation, and the doctor had taken a seat near the young captain, Tom asked:

“Is opium smoking a very great evil in San Francisco, Doctor? That is, do very many take to it?”

“Not a very large proportion of the white-

population, I am glad to say," responded the physician. "Still, when the hop habit does get hold of our white people it works fearful havoc with them. Opium and morphine streak all the crime in San Francisco. These habits are the horrible revenge that the Chinaman has taken upon the city for the persecution the Chinaman once suffered at the hands of our hoodlums."

"Then opium and morphine are largely responsible for the crime and vice in the big city we have just left?" asked Halstead.

"No; I won't say they're responsible," replied Dr. Gray. "But they color the wickedness of San Francisco in their own way. There's a heap of wickedness in every large city, but the crimes and vices here take on aspects that are tremendously due to the use of opium and morphine by the criminal classes. A very large percentage of our San Francisco jailbirds use either opium or morphine. These drugs give them a lower order of intelligence, and make them more cowardly, though often more desperate when they find themselves driven into a corner. Captain Halstead, be sure you never allow yourself to be tempted to use either of those drugs."

"Thank you; I don't believe I shall," smiled the young skipper. "Especially, after what I've seen to-night."

"Great as the curse of alcohol is," added Dr.

Gray, "the bane of opium is ten-fold greater. In two or three generations it would ruin any race."

"Then why isn't the Chinese nation destroyed?" asked Halstead.

"Because, although we have imported these dread habits from China, only a small proportion of the Chinese people use the drugs. Those who do are the outcasts of China."

It was growing late, so the young skipper rose, inquiring whether the owner had any further orders for him.

"None, thank you, Captain," replied Mr. Baldwin.

Tom thereupon took his leave, returning to deck. The "Panther" was now miles westward of the coast.

"Ugh!" shivered young Halstead, as he stepped out on deck. Though it was February, the air had been all but balmy in town. Out on the bay there had been a little more chill in the air. But now, out on the wide expanse of the ocean, there was a cold, damp wind blowing that seemed to bite to the marrow after the bright warmth of the main cabin.

Tom promptly stepped into his own cabin, taking down his deck ulster and donning it. Then he made his way to the bridge, where Dick Davis was pacing from side to side.

"No; I don't want any ice cream, thank you," grinned Dick, as his captain joined him. Davis, who wore a reefer, was beating his arms against his sides as though to keep warm. "I've been wishing, Captain, I could get below for my ulster."

"Go ahead," nodded Halstead. "I'll walk the bridge until you return." Dick needed no urging, but made speed for his stateroom below. When he came back he looked more contented.

"Queer climate, this," he remarked.

"Yes," agreed the young skipper. "I'm told the thermometer never shows a very low marking, but that the night air chills one down to the marrow of his bones."

For five minutes more young Halstead remained on the bridge, then went below, after having left the customary instructions to call him to the bridge in case he was needed.

"Well, it's great to walk the bridge of as fine a craft as puts out of San Francisco," Dick told himself, later on in the night. "But at night it's mighty lonesome. I almost wish I could call one of the deckhands up here to talk to."

Of the seven seamen of the crew, one was assigned to work under the first officer's orders during the daytime. The remaining six were divided between the two watches. Of the three now at Davis's orders, one was in the pilot house,

for the purpose of relieving the quartermaster whenever required. A second seaman, at night, stood out far forward as bow-watch. The third made regular trips of inspection around the yacht, unless ordered to some other duty.

Jed Prentiss, sitting all alone down in the motor room, made the sixth of those who were now awake on board the "Panther." At starboard and port the colored running lights gleamed; a third light, white, twinkled from the foremast-head. On the bridge stood a powerful searchlight whose rays could be turned on at will.

Thus manned, the "Panther" swept on steadily over the ocean, now headed south. The solitary, boyish figure pacing the bridge, represented in the night the brains and the present master-hand of this yacht, which, equipped with a single three-inch cannon at the bow, could have outrun or destroyed all the navies, combined, of ancient times.

Through the night the sea roughened a good deal. The wind blew more freshly, coming down off the land from the northeast. Still, the yacht was in no labor in the sea, and the sky remained bright overhead. So the second officer did not feel it necessary to disturb the rest of the captain.

At a quarter of eight in the morning, however,

with the sun hidden behind a haze, Dick pressed the button that sounded the electric vibrating bell over Tom Halstead's berth. Then Davis picked up the mouthpiece of the speaking tube to the pilot house.

"Call the port watch," directed Dick, when the seaman had answered.

Captain Tom came up on the bridge, pulling on his ulster as he came. He greeted Dick, then stood looking about at the sky.

"It has freshened up a good deal in the night," remarked the young skipper.

"Yes; I thought, sir, you'd want to see the weather while the watch was changing."

Third Officer Costigan was not long in appearing, greeting his two superior officers as he reached the bridge.

"Does this weather spell trouble coming on this coast, Mr. Costigan?" questioned Halstead.

"It'll most likely turn rougher, sir. Sometimes we get a gale out of the northeast in February, though not as often as you do on the Atlantic. That's all I can say, sir. How's the glass? The barometer, you see, sir, is behaving like a gentleman at present."

As Dick left the bridge at the changing of the watch, Tom followed him. Halstead went to his own cabin, where he ordered his breakfast served. This meal eaten, the young skipper,

who still felt the fatigue of late hours the night before, threw himself down on a divan. Though he had not intended to sleep, in less than five minutes Tom Halstead had traveled all the way to the land of Nod.

Nor did the increased rolling and pitching of the "Panther" disturb him; if anything, it lulled the young skipper into sounder slumber.

By ten o'clock the gale was going more than forty miles an hour. At eleven Ab Perkins turned the knob of the door, stepping inside. As Ab stood there looking at the occupant of the divan, moisture dripped from the ulster of the first officer.

"I guess we need you on deck, sir," roared Ab, shaking the young captain's shoulder. In a twinkling, Halstead was awake. In another instant he was on his feet.

"Weather is booming a bit, eh?" cried Captain Tom, eagerly.

"Nothing near as much, sir, as this craft can stand with comfort," Ab responded. "But we're coming up with a schooner under bare poles and wallowing badly. Foretop-mast blown away, too, and some of the bowsprit missing."

"Then you did right to call me," rejoined Halstead, pulling on his shoes swiftly, and standing up to don his cap and reefer. "I'll go on the bridge at once."

Baldwin and three of the passengers were on deck as Captain Tom appeared. Halstead nodded their way, then hurriedly climbed the bridge stairs. Now, he turned to take a look at the schooner. She lay dead ahead, for Costigan had ordered the "Panther's" course altered so as to speak the craft in distress. She was still about a mile distant, but for a keen-eyed sailor it needed no glass to make out the fact that the three-master was in utter distress.

"Hard luck, that, in only a forty-mile blow," muttered Tom.

"Wind-gauge shows forty-eight, sir," replied Mr. Costigan.

"Anyway, someone must have been dozing on that schooner, to let her canvas be blown away in such a wind," contended the young skipper.

Then Tom picked up the marine glasses, for a good look at the craft.

"Why, confound it, she has nothing left but a dinghy at the stern davits," muttered Captain Halstead. "I'm afraid, Mr. Costigan, we've got to get out our own boat."

"I'm afraid so, sir."

"Then tumble out the starboard watch."

The order was given through the pilot house speaking tube. The sailor down there with the quartermaster went below at lively speed, routing out the sleeping watch.

By the time they were on deck Tom Halstead was manœuvring the motor yacht around to leeward of the wreck.

"Schooner, ahoy!" he bellowed through a megaphone, from the bridge end.

"Yacht ahoy!" came back the faint answer on the breeze. "This is the schooner 'Alert,' Seattle; Jordrey, master."

"What help do you want, 'Alert'?"

"We're ready to abandon our vessel. Send us a boat, if you can."

"Boat it is, then, Captain," Tom bawled back, lustily. "Stand by to help our boat make fast alongside your lee quarter!"

Then, turning, glancing down at the deck, Tom called:

"Mr. Davis, the rescue boat is the second officer's trick!"

"Glad of it, sir," retorted Dick, his eyes glistening.

"Lower the port life-boat. Take four men at the oars and one for the bow. You'll have to row. The power tender would be worthless in this sea. Mr. Perkins will take the bridge. Mr. Costigan and the quartermasters will help you off, Mr. Davis."

Officers and men all moved with perfect discipline. With a merry roar they lowered the life-boat. A boarding gangway was lowered at

the side, and down this the crew of the life-boat scrambled. Dick Davis took his place at the tiller.

“Cast off,” he commanded. “Shove off. Let fall oars. Now, then—at it, hearties!”

From owner and passengers a cheer went up as the boat put off in such famous style. In another instant, however, the boat tossed like a cork on a high, rolling wave. Then it went down in the hollow between two billows. It was up in sight, an instant later. The men at the oars were doing their work with a will. Over the water struggled the life-boat, and then turned to come up under the lee quarter of the schooner.

Suddenly Captain Tom Halstead clutched desperately at the bridge rail, his face going deathly white.

“Merciful heaven!” he quivered, staring hard. For, near the crest of a wave, the life-boat heeled. Another big wave caught her.

Dick Davis and the boat’s crew had been hurled from the overturning boat!

CHAPTER VIII

THE REAL KENNEBEC WAY

THE young skipper of the "Panther" brushed his hand past his eyes.

It was no dream, no trick of the vision. The life-boat was overturned, riding keel upward, while two of its crew clung desperately to the keel. A third head could be seen bobbing on the water. What had become of the other three human beings?

"Mr. Perkins, take command of the 'Panther,' ordered Tom, hoarsely. "Mr. Dawson, you and Mr. Prentiss, with two of the quartermasters and the remaining seaman, stand by the star-board life-boat. I'll go in charge."

All those ordered sprang to their posts. Like a flash the davits were swung around outward, other hands loosening the lowering tackle.

"Captain, this is madness," remonstrated Mr. Baldwin. "If that boat couldn't ride the water, this one can't."

"This one must," retorted Captain Tom. "They're our own shipmates in the water over there. Stand by to lower!"

"Captain, I protest!" cried Baldwin.

"Get out of the way, then, sir, and do your

protesting in private," came, sternly, from the young skipper.

Before those flashing eyes Mr. Baldwin took a step backward. At sea the captain, not the owner, commands, and Joseph Baldwin quickly realized it.

"Captain!" roared down Ab Perkins's voice from the bridge.

On the point of giving the lowering-away order, Tom turned to look where the first officer pointed.

In another second Captain Halstead commanded, hoarsely:

"Stand by your posts at the davits!"

Then he darted forward along the rail, taking in the inspiring sight that greeted his eyes.

Though Dick Davis had met with bad luck, he did not mean to let it turn into disaster.

Seeing two of his boat's crew safe for the moment, Dick succeeded in helping two more sailors to gain the boat. Still another was making stubborn headway over the waves toward the side of the schooner, where one of the crew of the wreck stood ready to cast a rope.

And now the master of the "Alert" made a splendid cast with a line that shot far out, uncoiling until it lay across the overturned boat.

"Good old Dick!" breathed young Halstead, as he saw his second officer catch the rope and

pass the end quickly back past the others who clung to the keel of the overturned life-boat.

The swimmer had now succeeded in reaching the rope, and was being helped up to the schooner's deck. Dick and the remaining men, besides holding onto the overturned boat, were slowly aiding those at the schooner's rail to haul them to greater safety.

When Halstead saw the overturned boat made fast along under the schooner's lee he turned to shout back:

"Swing in the davits, but stand by. We may need our boat yet."

Dick Davis, however, aided by his own men and those on the derelict, was working hard to right the life-boat. When they succeeded a great cheer went up from the watchers on the "Panther."

"Shall I go in closer, sir?" The question came from Parkinson, the chief steward, who, when Captain Tom made such a draft for a second crew, had been sent to the wheel house.

"Get your orders from the bridge," Tom called back to him.

Though Davis had lost his oars in the upset, the master of the "Alert" was able to supply others. Now the loading of the life boat began. On the return trip Dick was able to have six oarsmen. All hands stowed themselves away in the

life-boat, Captain Jordrey coming last of all, with his log, papers and instruments. Then Davis gave the order to shove off.

"Our friend is taking a big passenger contract, on such a rough sea," Tom muttered, uneasily, to Joe Dawson, who had joined him. "But Dick will pull it through, if anyone can."

The life-boat, which was not of the largest size, lay low in the water as she set out on her return. Every now and then one of the waves broke with a choppy crest, to be succeeded by a long, rolling mass of water that threatened to fill and overwhelm the boat. Dick Davis, however, standing up, with one hand on the tiller and one knee against it, handled his little craft with a master's skill.

"Your friend is a wonderfully good officer, Captain," cried Joseph Baldwin, enthusiastically.

"Any of my other officers could do as well, sir," Tom replied, calmly. "It's the way of the Motor Boat Club training, and its effect on boys of sea-roving stock."

Yet there were half a dozen times, on that perilous return trip, when those on the deck of the "Panther" held their breath, their pulses moving faster.

At just the right moment Ab Perkins swung the craft around somewhat to starboard, then

headed in so that Dick Davis was able more quickly to have the life-boat up under the yacht's broad lee.

Then, in a moment of relief, falls and tackle were made fast to the boat, and the rescued men began coming up over the side like so many squirrels.

"Where's your captain?" demanded Master Jordrey, as he came over the side. "I want to tell him that that boy officer of his is worth a dozen of some kinds of men I've seen."

"I'm captain here, at your service, sir," Tom announced, with a smile. Jordrey stared hard, for Tom was plainly much younger than Davis.

"What is this?" gasped the master of the "Alert." "A juvenile orphan asylum afloat, without the teachers? But no matter who you are, you know how to handle boats, large and small. My respects, Captain."

The two mates, cook and crew of the schooner were pressing forward. Costigan returned to the bridge, while Ab came down to the deck again, attending to the hoisting and stowing of the life-boat. Halstead grasped the hand of Dick Davis as he came over the side, looking at him with a gaze full of appreciation.

"Where are you bound, Captain Halstead?" inquired Captain Jordrey, a man of some forty years.

“Cruising,” Tom replied. “According to the owner’s whim or orders. But we can stow your people away somewhere on the boat until we make port, or pass some other craft in smoother water. There’s an extra stateroom forward, below, Captain Jordrey, that you can have.”

There were also three berths, not in use, in the forecandle. For the rest mattresses were laid, at need, on the forecandle floor.

“It serves my owners right to lose the schooner,” grumbled Jordrey. “The canvas was worn out. I put in a requisition for new sets of sails before leaving port, but they wouldn’t let me have them.”

Joseph Baldwin approached Davis while he and Tom were talking on the deck.

“All I want to say, Mr. Davis,” explained the owner, “is that, every time I see you Motor Boat Club boys do anything new it only makes me more and more glad that you’re on my craft.”

CHAPTER IX

THE CHASE OF THEIR LIVES

IT was Saturday forenoon when the officers and men of the "Alert" were taken from the wreck. By Sunday morning the sea was running smoothly after the short gale. On this latter morning the steamer from San Diego to San Francisco was sighted and hailed, and Captain Jordrey and his men were transferred to her.

At this time the "Panther" was cruising leisurely, first north, then south, out of sight of land, and at a mean distance of some two hundred miles from the Golden Gate.

On this Sunday morning young Gaston Giddings appeared on deck. He appeared to have entirely recovered from his late debauch, though his eyes lacked their natural luster. He was tastefully attired in a new suit and top-coat taken from his wardrobe on board. He and Joseph Baldwin walked much together, talking, and once in a while Mr. Ross joined them.

"Captain," called the owner, as young Halstead stepped on deck.

"Yes, sir," responded Tom, approaching.

"Mr. Giddings understands the part you played Friday night," went on Mr. Baldwin, in a low voice.

"And I wish to thank you, of course," put in Giddings, holding out his hand, though it seemed to the young skipper that his own pressure was not very cordially returned.

"You're welcome, of course, Mr. Giddings," smiled Halstead, "though I hope I shall never have a chance to render the same service again."

"I hope not," sighed the young man. Though Tom did not stare impertinently, he looked into the young man's face long enough to note the lifelessness depicted there, and the weakness of the mouth.

"It seems queer to think of such a young fellow, and such a pulseless piece of putty, being president of a great bank," thought Tom to himself. "However, of course, if he inherited the controlling stock, he could see to it that he was elected to the post."

Dr. Gray, though he did not often speak to Giddings, hovered on deck, keeping a rather watchful look over the young man.

During the afternoon Tom had occasion to go to the main cabin briefly. Mr. Baldwin looked around from the table at which he sat with his guests. He nodded to the young captain, then

turned back to the pile of papers that he had evidently been discussing with his guests.

"You needn't go, Captain," called the owner over his shoulder. "We are talking business, but we know you have no ears, away from your duties. Now, Giddings, as I've been explaining to you, we need ten million dollars in cash to put this matter in motion. Your bank, the Sheepmen's, then, will advance five millions on the collateral we have been discussing, and the syndicate of banks that I have named will put up the other five millions. That will start the matter in motion. Then, when we come to the second step in the game, we shall have to be ready with fifteen millions, and of this money the Sheepmen's——"

Tom Halstead heard, yet didn't hear. It was all a matter of listless indifference to him what these men of the money world were planning in the way of new and big enterprises. The young captain would have been much more interested in reading the "Panther's" patent log.

"Are you certain, Giddings, that you have facilities for turning over the five millions to us at once?" asked Mr. Ross.

"Why, we've been calling in cash for some days," replied Gaston Giddings. "We've been preparing for this demand of yours for money. Then, you know, we secured the whole of the

Treasury Department's last apportionment of thousand-dollar Treasury notes. We have three million dollars' worth of these notes locked in our vaults at this moment. That's good enough money for you, isn't it?" demanded the young bank president, boastfully.

"Yes," muttered Ross, "if it's all there when we get back."

"What do you mean?" demanded Giddings, flushing.

"I guess you know how highly I esteem your cashier, Rollings?"

"He's all right," declared Giddings, hotly.

"As long as I don't own any stock in your bank I'm not worrying," replied Ross, rather shortly. "It's none of my business, young man; yet, as one of your father's friends, I can't help being uneasy over the thought that Rollings has the combination of your main vault."

"If he didn't have, I could hardly take these jaunts out to sea," retorted the young man.

"Yes, you could; Hawkins, your vice-president and your father's before you, is a man to be trusted with anything. Hawkins could go to the main vault whenever necessary. For Rollings to have that combination——"

"I don't want to hear any more of this!" cried Giddings, hotly, rising from the table.

"You don't need to, then," rejoined Mr. Ross, coolly. "You know what I *think*."

"Don't get in a huff, Gaston," put in Joseph Baldwin, briskly. "Ross has told you, plainly, in so many words, just what other friends of yours think of Rollings. He's an able banking man, but none of us think too highly of his honesty. You'll find that two of your own directors, Mr. Pendleton and Mr. Howe, who are here, agree with Mr. Ross and myself."

Mr. Howe remained silent, tapping the table with a pencil, but Mr. Pendleton said, slowly:

"Oh, I guess Frank Rollings is all right. Still, I wish, with the others, that he didn't have such easy access to three millions of dollars in bills of such large denomination that the whole sum could be carried off in a satchel."

"Gentlemen," announced Giddings, rather stiffly, "when we reach San Francisco to-morrow morning, and find that the money is all safe, I shall consider that I have the apology of each one of you for the doubts thrown at my friend, Frank Rollings, behind his back."

That was the last that Tom Halstead heard, for he left the cabin. At eight o'clock that evening, however, the young skipper received his orders from Mr. Baldwin to make San Francisco at ten the following forenoon. Almost to the minute the yacht's bow anchors were let go

at her usual moorings in San Francisco Bay. The power tender was lowered over the side, to take Mr. Baldwin and his guests ashore, Quartermaster Bickson going along to handle the boat.

"Come along with us, if you like, Captain," invited Mr. Baldwin. "After we get through our business at the bank our party will lunch at one of the clubs. It ought to be pleasant for you."

Tom gratefully accepted, making a swift change from his uniform to ordinary street dress.

Gaston Giddings held his head a good deal higher than usual when he led the party from carriages into the sombre, solid old building in which the Sheepmen's Bank was housed. The young president conducted his party through the long counting room and into the president's office at the rear.

Here Giddings took command, as by right. Showing his guests to seats, he stepped over to a massive roll-top desk, unlocking it and throwing the roll up. Then he pressed a button on his desk. One of the bank's messengers entered.

"Ask Mr. Rollings to come in," desired Giddings.

The messenger soon returned, to report:

"Mr. Rollings is out at this moment. Mr. Conroy, the first assistant cashier, is at his desk."

"Mr. Conroy will do, then."

The first assistant cashier was soon in the president's office. To him Giddings explained about the loan that had been decided upon.

"I will prepare a list, Mr. Conroy, of stable securities on which I wish you to raise two million dollars in cash at once. But, first of all, get Mr. Hawkins to go to the main vault with you. Tell Mr. Hawkins that I wish the three millions in thousand-dollar notes brought here. You come back here with Mr. Hawkins."

"Can it be delayed for just a little while, sir?" inquired Conroy. "Two of the United States bank examiners are here, prepared to go over our assets."

"Bring that three million here at once," rapped out Gaston Giddings, rather sharply. "The bank examiners may come in here and help in counting it here in my office. Now, go; carry out my orders, precisely."

Mr. Conroy departed in haste. While he was gone the two bank examiners entered the president's room. Giddings greeted them, asking them to take seats. Cigars were passed about by a messenger. The air was rather thick with smoke when Conroy returned, accom-

panied by the aged vice-president, Mr. Hawkins. The latter carried a satchel, which he took to the large centre table.

"The money there?" inquired Giddings.

"Yes, sir," responded Mr. Hawkins. "I understood that you wished to look it over here."

As Giddings laid down his cigar, moving over to the table, the two bank examiners joined the bank's officers.

Not a very imposing-looking pile was revealed when Mr. Hawkins opened the satchel, drawing forth the contents—three not very large packages covered with numerous heavy seals.

"As I'll probably never see three million dollars again in my life, I'll try to get a good look now," thought Tom Halstead, keenly alive with interest. He sat at some distance from the table, but had a good view.

Gaston Giddings himself opened one of the packages. He broke the seals deliberately, then unfolded many wrappings. Suddenly the contents of the package fell to the polished mahogany surface of the table, followed by the frenzied gaze of the young president.

"*Nothing but blank brown paper!*" he screamed, hoarsely. He collapsed, falling with his arms across the table, his eyes bulging as though an epileptic seizure threatened him.

With a fearful gasp Henry Hawkins snatched up another package, tearing it nervously apart. Conroy did the same with the third package. In each case the result was the same.

“Three million dollars worth of brown paper!” clicked one of the bank examiners.

Gaston Giddings, moaning piteously, turned, tottering back to his desk, where he fell heavily into his chair, next letting his head fall forward on his arms. Messrs. Hawkins and Conroy recovered much more quickly. They darted out into the counting room, but presently came back to report.

Frank Rollings had been gone more than an hour. When he left, he had carried a satchel. Some fifteen minutes before leaving the bank he had been in the main vault, the huge steel door of which he had afterwards closed. Conroy was now in that vault, with several subordinates, engaged in making a rapid survey of the other contents.

In the president's room Henry Hawkins, who no longer waited to consult the almost paralyzed young president, went swiftly to the telephone. The Bankers' Protective Association, advised by telephone, swiftly had half a dozen detectives scurrying to the bayside, to take up the trail at the ferry that furnishes the sole avenue to the east. Others of these detectives

covered the docks of vessels due to sail that day from the port of San Francisco.

Nor did the bank examiners present fail to do their duty promptly. Within a few minutes a United States assistant district attorney and two deputy marshals arrived at the bank.

From the first moment none who had knowledge of the affair believed Frank Rollings, the absent cashier, to be innocent. The assistant district attorney swiftly drew up an information, which Giddings and Hawkins signed under oath. The law's officer rushed off to get from a United States judge a brief warrant authorizing the arrest of the cashier, for the Sheepmen's was a national bank, and the robbery came under the jurisdiction of the United States courts.

Then came a telephone message from the Banker's Association:

"One of our detectives has learned that Rollings sailed, an hour ago, on the steam yacht, 'Victor.' An observer at the Cliff House reports that he has made out the 'Victor,' some miles from the coast, hull-down to the southwest!"

That news electrified those in the bank president's office. They sprang into action. Automobiles were summoned to the door of the bank. Joseph Baldwin's same party sped back

to the water front. Another 'phone message summoned the assistant district attorney and his marshals to meet them at the landing stage.

It was all carried through with a rush. Hardly had the last member of the party stepped over the side of the "Panther" before Tom Halstead had the anchors up and stowed. The young skipper himself, from the bridge, rang the engine room bell for half speed ahead, quickly changing this to full speed.

"Are you in the engine room, Joe Dawson?" called Skipper Tom, through the speaking tube.

"Right on hand!" came the answer.

"Then whoop up the speed for all you're worth. Let's have it all—every bit. We're on the chase of our lives!"

Captain Tom Halstead was still on the bridge when the Golden Gate was left behind. He was still there, more than two hours later, when the upper spars of a vessel believed to be the "Victor" were made out on the far southwestern horizon.

CHAPTER X

COMING TO CLOSE, DANGEROUS QUARTERS

“**H**AVE any of you gentlemen ever had a good, long look at the ‘Victor’?” shouted Captain Tom, leaning down over the starboard bridge rail.

“I have,” admitted Mr. Baldwin.

“Then I think you’d better come up here, sir, and take one of the glasses.”

“Think you’ve sighted her?” demanded Baldwin, eagerly, as he raced up the steps.

“We’ve sighted some yacht. We’ve got to cut down a few miles of the distance between us before we can be sure about the stranger.”

Then, while Baldwin held the glasses to his eyes, Dick Davis showing him where to look, Halstead snatched up the engine room speaking tube.

“Joe, give us more of that hot-foot, if it’s in the old motors. We think we’re in chase—but, oh, man, man! How we need speed now!”

“I can’t be sure of anything yet,” complained Mr. Baldwin, in a depressed tone. “We’ve got to be nearer, and see the hull of the craft yonder, before I can feel sure about her.”

"I'm pretty near sure, now, that it's the 'Victor,'" muttered Halstead, after he had picked up his own marine glass and used it for a few seconds.

"Why do you say that?" demanded the owner.

"Our masts must be visible to the commander of the other craft. As if he suspected pursuit, he's crowding on steam. See that big cloud of black smoke coming up between the other craft's masts?"

"Yes! You're right."

"Now, unless a captain who is already moving under good speed is trying to escape something, he doesn't suddenly throw on his furnace drafts in that fashion," went on Tom, hurriedly. "So, Mr. Baldwin, I think you may feel sure that you're speeding along in the wake of the 'Victor.'"

"I'll have to call Jephson up here and show him this," cried the owner, moving to the bridge rail.

"All right, sir. But don't ask any others up. We've got a hard chase in hand, and don't want enough folks up here to interfere with the handling of the 'Panther.'"

Jephson started quickly forward at the call.

"Have you sighted the runaway craft?" called Mr. Ross, also starting forward.

"We think so," Mr. Baldwin answered. "But don't come up here. Captain Halstead doesn't want a crowd on the bridge. All the space up here is needed for handling the yacht."

Mr. Jephson saw what there was to see. He added his belief that they were in the wake of the "Victor."

"Are you going to be able to overtake her, Captain?" he demanded, eagerly.

"We're going to try," Tom responded, anxiously. "We've only four hours of daylight, or so, left to us. If we can get close enough, however, we ought to hold the 'Victor' after dark with our searchlight."

"You'll overtake her, of course!" declared Joseph Baldwin, abruptly.

"Yet the 'Victor' is said to be a very fast boat, sir."

"So is the 'Panther,'" retorted the owner. "Besides, Captain Halstead, we've *got* to overtake her!"

Tom Halstead took up the mouth-piece of the engine room speaking tube.

"That you, chief?" he asked. "I think you'd better come to the bridge, watch the chase, and see what you have to beat."

Joe Dawson came immediately to the bridge. Presently he used the tube, calling down very

definite instructions to Jed Prentiss, whose trick it was at the motors.

"Keep a close eye on your helmsman's work, Mr. Davis," the young captain directed. "See to it that he doesn't waver a hair's breadth in bearing down on the stranger. Any speed lost in steering would be a useless waste."

While Joe remained on the bridge, Halstead soon went to the deck below. Mr. Baldwin followed him.

"If you can make the 'Panther' show all I think there is in her, Captain," commented the owner, "then we should overtake that other craft and have this chase ended in a few hours."

"The 'Panther' is doing, now, sir, all that she is capable of doing under her motors alone. The result of this race depends mainly on how well the steam yacht is handled, for she seems very nearly, if not quite, as speedy as your yacht."

"Is the 'Panther' going at absolutely her last quarter of a mile?"

"Chief Engineer Dawson informs me that he might get a little more speed out of the motors, but that he feels it wouldn't be altogether safe to try."

"Wouldn't a hoist of sail help us?"

"Not with the wind from the present quar-

ter," Tom replied, thoughtfully. "I have already been considering that."

"It seems hard to be beaten," sighed Joseph Baldwin. "It is hard, even, not to find ourselves racing right up on the 'Victor.'"

"We haven't been beaten yet, sir," smiled Halstead. "Nor are we beaten as long as we have the other boat in sight."

As Baldwin turned and stepped over to the rail, he saw Skipper Tom moving away.

"Where are you going, Captain?"

"To my cabin, sir, to take a nap."

"Nap?" echoed the owner, in great amazement.

"Yes, sir; I am afraid I shall be up about all night. Just now there's a chance for me to store up some sleep."

"But the chase?"

"Mr. Davis will have his orders to call me if we appear to be losing ground at all."

Mr. Baldwin looked his astonishment. He did not yet know the Motor Boat Club boys as well as he might have done. Dick Davis was up on the bridge, keen-eyed and alert. Dick knew well enough what to do, and he could call the young captain at need. Besides, Joe Dawson was up there with the second officer, watching the relative speeds of the two boats.

When Tom Halstead turned out again he had put two hours of sleep into his supply of reserve force.

"How do we stand, now, Mr. Davis?" asked the young skipper, reaching for the speaking tube.

"We've been gaining, sir. We can make out the upper hull, now. Mr. Baldwin is here on the bridge, and declares the stranger is the 'Victor.' One of the deputy marshals, who knows the boat well, is also certain."

"Is the 'Victor' burning coal as hard as ever?"

"Just as hard, sir."

"And we're gaining? That shows we can overhaul the other craft in time. How's the weather?"

"Slight haze, Captain, but fine weather," reported Dick Davis.

So Captain Tom Halstead felt that he could still safely take his time, for he expected to be all night on duty. He indulged in the luxury of a bath, dressed comfortably, drew on his reefer, then leisurely left his cabin, ascending the stairs to the bridge.

"I've hardly been away from here," announced Mr. Baldwin.

"I doubt if I shall be, to-night, sir," Tom answered.

"You speak of to-night as though you thought the chase would last through the hours of darkness."

"And doesn't it seem likely to you that it will, Mr. Baldwin, unless something happens to the 'Victor'?"

"I fear I was never built for slow, patient work like this," sighed the financier. "Gaining one second in every hour would wear me out in time."

Before dark Captain Halstead had the hull clearly in sight. The "Victor," however, was still some five miles in the lead, nor did the "Panther" appear to be gaining, much more than half a mile an hour.

It was Third Officer Costigan's watch on the bridge, by this time. Dick Davis, however, did not feel like turning in, and spent much of his time pacing the deck forward, keeping a sharp lookout.

Just before dark the motor yacht's searchlight was turned on. A few minutes later its thin, bright ribbon of light was kept almost constantly turned on the craft ahead.

Tom Halstead and Joe spent a comfortable amount of time over their dinner at table in the captain's cabin.

"I guess Mr. Baldwin wonders that we can take any comfort at this sort of thing,"

laughed Joe. "I'll wager he doesn't give much time to his supper to-night."

"Perhaps we wouldn't, either, if we owned considerable stock in the Sheepmen's Bank, as Mr. Baldwin does," murmured Halstead. "For him, and for some of the others aboard, this race is for tremendously heavy stakes. I wish, though, that Mr. Baldwin could realize that, even if we do eat, and even nap, we are straining every nerve to catch up with the other boat."

Just then the buzzer for the bridge speaking tube sounded. Tom was able to reach the mouthpiece without leaving the table.

"Captain," reported Mr. Costigan, "the craft ahead seems to be making somewhat less speed."

"Does it look like a break-down?" asked the young skipper.

"Can't say, sir. But the 'Victor' must be going two miles an hour slower than she was ten minutes ago."

"That's the best news I've heard, Mr. Costigan. Watch your helmsman's work. Let me know if anything more happens. Anyway, I'll be on the bridge as soon as I've finished dinner."

Joe, who had jumped up while he heard his chum speaking, now looked astonished.

"Going to finish your dinner, Tom, after hearing such news as that?"

"Yes. Why not? Oh, I'm enthusiastic enough, but it takes gasoline, not enthusiasm, to keep motors going. You might call the news down to Jeff Randolph, though, and see whether he thinks he can put on any more spurt without danger."

Jeff Randolph reported that the motors were going at top speed.

Chief Steward Parkinson came in to remove the dishes for that course. His face was glowing.

"Mr. Baldwin's up on the bridge, Captain," reported the steward.

"I thought he would be," nodded the young skipper, coolly.

Twenty minutes later, when Captain Tom Halstead had finished the last of the meal, he rose, donning his cap, then pulling on his deck ulster.

"Now," he remarked, quietly, "I think I'll go above and have a look."

Joe Dawson followed at his heels. The long beam of the searchlight trailed out over the water, its further end resting across the stern of the "Victor." Mr. Costigan had ordered a sailor to the bridge, whose sole duty was to keep the searchlight trained.

"This race can't last much longer," cried Mr. Baldwin, gleefully.

"The present indications, sir," Tom replied, "are that it will last more than long enough for you to go below and have your dinner, Mr. Baldwin, if you want it."

"I think I will go," laughed the owner. "Standing up here, watching, watching all the time, my nerves are getting thready. You'll call me, of course, if——"

"When we get near enough to hail the other boat, sir," Tom Halstead replied, gravely.

Dinner was not quite over in the main cabin when Skipper Tom uttered a sudden exclamation that made Costigan wheel about.

The "Victor" was palpably slowing down.

"What can that mean?" demanded Halstead.

"A crank-pin loose, or some other trouble with the machinery, sir?" suggested the third officer.

Tom Halstead quickly summoned the sailor who was with the quartermaster in the pilot house.

"Go to the main cabin, with my compliments, and tell Mr. Baldwin that the other craft is slowing down," ordered Tom.

There was a rush from below. The assistant from the United States district attorney's office took but a brief look, then dived below to find

his two deputy marshals. These two officers followed their superior to the deck, stationing themselves in the bow.

“Captain,” shouted Mr. Jephson, “will you go up close enough so that I can hail them?”

“When we overtake the steam yacht,” Captain Halstead shouted back, “I shall run up to starboard of her, and as close as I can without danger of collision.”

“That will do excellently, Captain,” assented the district attorney’s assistant.

The “Panther” was now rapidly closing in on the distance that separated the two craft. As yet, however, the motor yacht remained almost fairly astern.

Suddenly, from one of the stern port-holes of the steam yacht there came two red flashes. A bullet crashed through the glass in the front window of the “Panther’s” pilot house. Captain Tom was standing with his head some two feet from the searchlight. The second bullet whizzed between his head and the light.

Almost instantly two more flashes showed ahead.

CHAPTER XI

GASTON GIDDINGS MAKES TROUBLE

THE second pair of bullets passed overhead, though close enough for their whistling song to be heard.

In a jiffy there was a mad scramble to get away from the bridge. Captain Tom Halstead and Third Officer Costigan had that place to themselves.

"Throw the wheel over three points to the starboard! Hold to a course three points off the present one," called Halstead, sharply.

"You men answer with your revolvers," was Mr. Jephson's order.

"Our revolvers wouldn't carry that far, sir," objected one of the deputy marshals.

"I know it, but let those scoundrels discover that we have firearms too," retorted the district attorney's assistant.

So the futile revolver shots flashed out. In answer a rifle bullet carried away the hat of one of the deputies.

"That's confounded close shooting," coolly uttered the unhatted one, running down the deck after his head gear.

Another shot flew by close to the searchlight.

"That's the mark the scoundrels are aiming at," muttered the young skipper, angrily. "Turn off the current, Mr. Costigan, and I'll unship the light."

This done, the big reflector and the bulb behind it were taken down to the pilot house by one of the sailors.

"You confounded pirates!" roared the district attorney, shaking his fist in the direction of the "Victor."

"That *was* actual piracy, wasn't it?" questioned Mr. Baldwin.

"Nothing else!" retorted the assistant, angrily, as he came down aft to place the wheel house between himself and that other craft. "If we ever get that captain and crew on shore we'll make 'em smart in a trial for piracy!"

Having veered off the course of direct pursuit, Captain Halstead was now steering ahead, meaning to run parallel with the "Victor." He kept half a mile away, but, even had the other craft lowered its running lights, the starlight was bright enough to enable the bridge officer to keep the "Victor" in sight.

"Try to keep just this distance, Mr. Costigan," directed Tom Halstead.

"Aye, aye, sir."

Tom then descended to the deck, where he sauntered up to the excited group.

"What's your guess, Halstead, as to the meaning of those shots?" questioned Mr. Baldwin.

"Well, of course," replied Tom, slowly, "the master of that other yacht would be glad to see our searchlight smashed. That was one reason for the firing."

"And another?"

"Why, I imagine, sir, those people want us to know that they carry rifles. They want to show us the folly of thinking we can pursue and board them."

"This pursuit should really have been undertaken by a naval vessel or revenue cutter," said Mr. Jephson, rather disgustedly. "One shot from the bowgun of an armed vessel would bring that yacht lying to in a jiffy."

"Humph!" grunted the practical Mr. Baldwin. "There isn't a cutter or gunboat in San Francisco waters fast enough to overtake either of these boats."

"I don't understand, sir," put in Halstead, quietly, "why you haven't had a wireles telegraph apparatus installed aboard this yacht. Why, even the little fifty-five foot boat that Dawson and I own has a wireless installation."

"What would you do with one, if you had it on board now?" asked Mr. Baldwin.

"Do?" repeated Halstead. "Why, we could signal in all directions. There may be some

fast cruiser or torpedo boat destroyer, out of our sight, yet within reach by wireless. If we could pick up one such vessel now, we could soon end this chase, and without bloodshed. Even any foreign war vessel would answer, for all war vessels have the right to overhaul and capture pirates. Any warship of any nation in the world would act, now, on a request from Mr. Jephson, who represents the United States. And such help may be not twenty miles off, but we have no wireless with which to find out."

"As we haven't a wireless installation," pursued Mr. Baldwin, "what are we going to do now, Mr. Jephson?"

"I trust you'll continue to keep that other yacht in sight," replied the assistant district attorney. "We may yet meet a warship or a revenue cutter."

"Any kind of a vessel we meet may have a few rifles on board that we could borrow or buy," suggested Captain Tom.

"Anyway," decided Mr. Baldwin, "we'll keep that pirate craft right in sight if we can, and as long as we can. We'll trust for something to turn up that will throw luck in our way."

The "Victor" which was of some ten feet greater length than the "Panther," looked like a boat which, despite her speed, was built to carry a good deal of coal.

Yet, through the next few hours that followed, no attempt was made by those handling the steam craft to get her best speed out of her. It looked as though her sailing master and engineer meant to save some coal, now that the "Panther" had caught up and could keep up. Both vessels continued at a speed of some sixteen miles per hour.

Mr. Baldwin and his guests remained on deck. So did young Halstead, who had decided that he must now do with but little sleep while the chase continued in its present phase.

"Any sharp little sea-trick might enable the other fellows to slip away from us," he declared to the owner. "Every man on board ought to help in the good work on hand."

At about eleven o'clock the young skipper left Mr. Costigan on the bridge, and went below, though he did not turn in.

Nor had any of the passengers sought their berths. All of Mr. Baldwin's friends were on deck. Young Gaston Giddings, however, paced nervously, apart from the rest.

"He's fretting over his folly in keeping Rollings in such an important post, and giving the rascal the chance to run away with all that money, I suppose," thought the young skipper.

Somehow, Tom could not help watching Giddings a good deal. It was the nervous hitch in

the young man's gait that first caught Halstead's eye. Presently the young captain of the "Panther" strolled slowly by Gaston Giddings.

"Confound it, what a queer, restless look there is in the fellow's eyes," thought Tom, uneasy, though he could hardly have explained why.

After that Halstead watched the young bank president even more closely, though he took pains to hide the scrutiny.

A request from Mr. Jephson called the cabin party over to the port rail to watch the "Victor." The instant the last of his companions had gone forward, and had passed around the pilot house, Giddings, after a swift look about him, stole into the dining saloon.

Tom Halstead, ostensibly lounging behind one of the life-boats, saw this move.

"Now, what's he up to?" muttered Tom. "Mischief, judging by his queer antics. We've mischief enough to deal with, without having it take place right on board our own boat!"

Halstead stole forward in time to see Giddings darting down the staircase into the main cabin.

"I'll just get down where I can watch this," muttered Tom. Concealed near the foot of the staircase, he saw Giddings, with some sort of a small tool, prying the lock of Dr. Gray's medicine case open.

"Oho!" muttered Halstead, as he saw young

Mr. Giddings abstract a small, screw-capped vial. "There's morphine in that doctor's outfit, and Giddings has guessed it!"

Tossing the medicine case back into the doctor's stateroom, Gaston Giddings stole up the after-companionway to the deck aft.

"With all our other troubles aboard, I don't believe we want any morphine maniacs here!" muttered Tom Halstead, excitedly.

Giddings, quivering with eagerness, trembling with aggravated nervousness, leaned against the stern rail, glancing out over the water as he drew the screw-capped vial from his pocket.

Just as he started to remove the cap from the bottle, a hand shot around him from the rear.

The young skipper of the "Panther" snatched the vial, remarking coolly:

"Mr. Giddings, you don't need that stuff, and no one on board wants you to have it."

With a swift movement, Halstead dropped the vial into one of his pockets.

"You confounded thief!" hissed Gaston Giddings.

Swift as a flash, in his rage, the young man sprang at the youthful skipper of the yacht.

"You'll give that back to me, or go overboard!" snarled the victim of the drug habit.

"If you get it, it'll be after I'm overboard," snapped back Tom.

In another instant Giddings's fingers were wrapped in a tight hold about Tom's throat. The drug maniac seemed possessed, for the instant, of the strength of half a dozen men.

The young skipper himself was no weakling, but now he had his hands full.

Even had he been so minded, he could not have called for help. Backward and forward the pair struggled for a few seconds. Then the young skipper found himself growing weaker for lack of air.

With a triumphant snarl Gaston Giddings forced his antagonist to the stern rail. Still Tom Halstead fought furiously, silently, with that tight grip at his throat making his brain reel. He realized that Gaston Giddings was winning the victory!

CHAPTER XII

TOO-WHOO-OO! IS THE WORD

IN that last desperate moment Tom Halstead employed the trick he had hesitated to use.

He raised one of his feet, kicking smartly at the left knee-cap of his assailant.

With a groan, Giddings weakened his hold, for the pain following the kick was intense.

Throwing both his arms tightly around the

young man, Halstead held on, drawing himself back to the deck as Giddings fell back.

"You're not going to fool me that way!" snarled the young drug maniac. He made another spring, trying to forget the pain in his knee.

But Halstead had regained his footing fully. Now, he dodged, then closed in, tripping Giddings and throwing him heavily to the deck.

"What's this? What's this going on?" demanded Joseph Baldwin, running back along the port side, followed by Mr. Ross and Dr. Gray.

Halstead was now on top of his assailant, and, though Giddings still tried to fight with fury, his strength was deserting him.

"One of you hold him," urged Captain Tom, "and I'll get up and explain."

"Did he attack you?" insisted Mr. Baldwin.

"Well, rather," grunted Halstead.

"Let him up. He won't dare attack you again, with so many about."

"No; but he may may try to jump overboard," retorted Halstead. "Mr. Giddings has another drug streak on him. He's not responsible for what he does."

"I guess that's right," nodded Dr. Gray. "Baldwin, you and Mr. Ross hold him, while the captain gets up and tells us what has happened."

The young skipper quickly explained, produc-

ing the vial he had snatched from the young bank president.

“That’s all the morphine I have with me,” remarked Dr. Gray. “I’ll make sure of keeping that, hereafter, where no one but myself can find it. Mr. Baldwin, you’d better get the young man below. Use force, if you find it necessary.”

They accomplished this without having attracted the attention of any of the sailors or stewards. Mr. Giddings was then unceremoniously thrust into his stateroom, and the door locked, though this was not until the physician had searched the young man, removing his pocket knife and also the tool that the drug victim had used in forcing the lock of the medicine case.

“I did what I thought was right,” Halstead explained.

“And I’m mighty glad you saw him, and acted so promptly,” replied the physician.

Through the rest of the night the physician had a battle with his patient, working hard to keep a more pronounced streak of mania from coming on. It is to such fearful torments that “hop-fiends” and morphine users are always exposed in the end.

At midnight Dick Davis again went on the bridge, beginning his eight hours’ watch.

Though Halstead had the utmost faith in the skill and judgment of his friend, he, also, remained up until nearly four o'clock in the morning. Then he turned to leave the bridge.

"I'm going to my cabin now, Mr. Davis, to turn in on my sofa for a while. If I am needed for anything at all, don't hesitate to call me instantly."

"Aye, aye, Captain," Dick replied.

Barely two hours had the young skipper slept when the sharp, jarring tones of the vibrating electric bell from the bridge rang over his head. Tom was up in an instant, pulling on his shoes. As he reached for his deck ulster and cap there came from overhead a note that told him at once why he was wanted.

Too-whoo-oo-oo!

"Fog!" gasped the young yacht captain. "Of all the confounded luck!"

With his ulster over his arm he threw open the door of his cabin, making for the bridge steps.

The mist was yet light and curling as Captain Halstead reached the open. Second Officer Dick Davis met him at the head of the steps.

"How long has this been coming on?" demanded Halstead.

"The first little puffs rolled in half an hour ago," replied Dick. "You see, I've put in closer

to the enemy. We're still well in sight, or I'd have called you earlier."

The motor yacht was now running along abreast of the "Victor," and less than three hundred yards distant. The steam yacht's lights were in plain sight, save when occasional puffs of fog obscured them briefly.

Tom groaned with excitement.

"This is going to get heavier," he muttered.

"Yes, sir," nodded Davis. "Still, I didn't believe it necessary to call you until I had to use the whistle."

Too-whoo-oo-oo! sounded the auto fog-horn, controlled by the sailor on watch in the pilot-house with the quartermaster.

"You did right, Mr. Davis," the young skipper nodded. "But we're going to be up against it in half an hour. Where's your extra man of the watch?"

Davis blew a thrilling blast on his mate's whistle. In answer the third sailor of the watch came running to the bridge steps.

"My man," called down Halstead, "go at once to Mr. Baldwin's stateroom door, and tell him, with my compliments, that I believe he'd better come to the bridge at once."

Even with so imperative a summons as this, five or six minutes passed before the owner appeared on the scene.

"Good heavens, Captain!" gasped Joseph Baldwin. "And this white curtain is thickening all the time, isn't it?"

"The fog is beginning to roll in fast, now, sir. Mr. Davis, alter the course so as to bring us a hundred yards closer to the 'Victor.' We've got to keep her in sight to the last moment."

"We've got to keep that other boat in sight all the time," retorted Mr. Baldwin.

"As close as we can go without running her down," Halstead answered. "We've the rules of the sea to obey, sir, at any cost."

"Go and call Mr. Jephson here," shouted down Mr. Baldwin, to the sailor, who was still standing by at the port rail.

In another five minutes the representative of the United States district attorney at San Francisco was beside them on the bridge.

Dick Davis had now manœuvred the "Panther" in within one hundred and fifty yards of the "Victor." Closer than that Tom Halstead did not dare to go. Even this he considered almost too little sea-way.

"May the furies consume the luck!" growled the man of the law. "Yet, of course, we might have looked for this! It's bound to happen on this coast. A genuine, four-ply, real old 'Frisco fog reaching out to encompass us and let those blackguards yonder get away!"

Aboard the other yacht few signs of human life showed. One figure, wrapped in a great coat and topped by a sou'wester, huddled in the bow. That was the bow watch of the "Victor." As the light of coming morning began to filter through the increasing fog, it was possible, now and then, to make out a figure in the steam yacht's wheel house. A watch officer tramped the bridge. No other figures appeared. Once the steam yacht's watch officer looked directly over at his foes, and a cunning grin illumined his face.

"That's a great face to show above the hangman's noose!" bellowed Mr. Jephson, angrily, through the megaphone that he snatched up.

Captain Tom suddenly darted from the bridge, running to his cabin. When he came back he carried a pair of revolvers, one of which he handed to Dick Davis.

"Mr. Jephson, the fellows on that craft may open fire on us, at any moment, hoping to make us drop back into the fog. If they do, we'd better shoot back, eh, sir?"

"If they open fire on us," replied the assistant district attorney, promptly, "I order Mr. Davis and yourself to return it."

To make matters more emphatic, Mr. Jephson passed the word to have his two deputy marshals aroused at once and ordered to the deck.

Still, though the day broadened, the fog rolled in so thick and heavy that the steam yacht, nearby though it was, became more and more obscured.

Both yachts sounded their fog-horns simultaneously just as a final big, thick, white blanket of mist rolled in and shut them out of each other's view.

"Done! Beaten out!" groaned Mr. Jephson, savagely. "It's only a question of minutes, now, when we shall have lost all trail of that craft on this hidden waste of water!"

"Only a question of minutes?" repeated Tom Halstead, grimly. "Is it?"

CHAPTER XIII

THE CALL FROM OUT OF THE FOG

OUT of the dense fog to port came a chorus of derisive yells, then a prolonged blast of the "Victor's" fog-horn.

"That's as much as saying it's the last time we'll hear their toot," burst, savagely, from Mr. Baldwin.

"Maybe it is the last time," admitted Tom.

Mr. Jephson and the owner began to talk excitedly.

"Sh!" warned the young skipper. "We

don't want a tone aboard louder than a whisper. If we can keep this interval, or pretty near it, we can follow the steam yacht by the sound of her machinery. Mr. Davis, keep your ears strained for it, and shape our course accordingly."

In the hush that followed the keen-eared listeners could hear the now invisible "Victor" slowing down her speed. Captain Tom, the engine room speaking tube at his mouth, called down the orders softly for a similar slowing of speed. The "Panther" fell back close to the "Victor."

"Captain, they're likely to stop altogether, soon," whispered Mr. Jephson. "Then we won't hear a sound to guide us."

"We'd do the same," murmured Halstead. "Then the yachts would be likely to drift together and bump. No; I hardly believe the steam yacht's captain will try that trick. If he does, we must match it."

The two craft engaged in this marine game of blind man's buff were now going forward along their respective courses at not more than eight miles an hour. Greater speed was not advisable, for they were in the possible track of vessels plying between San Francisco and Hawaii, New Zealand or Australia.

For the next ten minutes there was no sound

from the "Victor's" fog-horn. To run without this precaution was all but tantamount to piracy in itself. Skipper Tom and Second Officer Davis, however, managed to keep within sound of the steam craft's machinery. So, presently, the "Victor's" steam fog-horn again sounded on the air.

Breakfast was served late, that morning, on board the motor yacht. All hands were too much interested in the difficult chase to think of eating before Nature made her demands clamoring.

At eight o'clock, when Third Officer Costigan again came up on the bridge to take his watch trick, Dick Davis declared he had no interest in sleep.

"You'd better go below," advised Tom. "This search through the fog may be a long one. We'll want all hands to be fresh and bright. Get four or five hours' sleep, anyway. I shall be on the bridge most of the time until you're called again."

So Dick went below and turned in, though almost with a grumble.

For the next three hours Halstead was almost constantly on the bridge. The blind pursuit kept up along the same lines. The steam yacht's machinery still sent its dull clatter across the waters. The quartermaster of the "Panther,"

with the help of the mate's orders, still steered by that sound.

"It'd be fierce to have a big, noisy liner rumble up close to us now, making noise enough to drown out the sound of our enemy," grumbled Captain Tom to the owner.

Mr. Jephson, standing close by, heard, and his eyes snapped.

"I hadn't thought of that," he growled. "Since that would be the toughest sort of luck, that's what is almost sure to happen."

"Don't complain of your luck," advised the young skipper, gravely. "We've been able to keep right along with the steam craft for some hours now. If we can do so for a few hours more, we're highly likely to run out of this fog and be under a clear sky again. So far, Mr. Jephson, our luck has been wondrously kind to us."

Halstead remained on deck until nearly two o'clock. Then he passed word for Ab Perkins. To that young first officer, in the presence of Baldwin, Ross and Jephson, he said:

"Mr. Perkins, my eyes are getting heavy, and I expect to be on deck most of the night. I'm going to turn in, now, for an hour or two. Call me, anyway, at the changing of the watches. You know the general orders, and I look to you not to let the 'Victor' slip away from us."

"If I do let her slip," affirmed Ab, "I'll eat the starboard life-boat."

"Mr. Perkins used to be the most famous 'hoodoo' at the mouth of the Kennebec," Tom laughed, softly, as he turned to Mr. Baldwin. "His luck changed, however, the day he went into the motor boating business. He's about the luckiest young navigator afloat these days."

Nor did Ab, left in temporary full command, intend to lose his later laurels. He soon left the bridge, however, feeling that he could listen more effectively from the port rail forward. Occasionally he turned to signal, silently, to Third Officer Costigan, who still kept to the bridge.

Part of the time the "Victor" sounded its fog-horn with pauses longer than the rules of the sea permitted in so deep a fog. It looked as though those aboard the steam yacht were willing to leave it to the "Panther" to warn away other craft from them both. However, thus far in the day, no other vessel had sounded through the fog. Apparently, these two craft had all of this part of the sea to themselves.

In the silence and under the white pall even the interest of the chase could not prevent the time from passing with deadly monotony for Ab Perkins. Quite plainly it impressed also the others that way, for the cabin passengers, two or three at a time, disappeared below. Messrs.

Baldwin and Ross remained on deck more than any of the cabin party, though even they went inside, restlessly, every now and then.

At last the deck was bare, save for Ab Perkins and the bow watch. In the pilot house stood the quartermaster and his seaman helper. On the bridge Mr. Costigan paced back and forth, glad that the fog was not too thick for him to make out the first officer forward.

One of Ab's reasons for being well up forward was that he might more readily hear the sound of fog-horn or of bell from any other vessel hidden away in this white gloom.

It was a long while before he heard anything, but at last it came:

"Help! Don't run me down!"

The voice came from low down upon the water, somewhat ahead and barely to port.

Quick as a flash the bow watch turned to see if the first officer and the bridge watch had heard. Both Perkins and Costigan had sprung to see what might come to them out of the fog.

"Careful!" warned Ab, in a steady voice. "Take the sound of my voice for your guide. I'm at the port rail, moving toward you."

Suddenly, out of the fog, there came into view, near at hand, a ship's yawl. It contained a single man, dark, rather tall and about thirty years of age. He was dressed carelessly, yet had

much the air of a gentleman. His clothing seemed to be soaked with moisture, as though he had been long exposed to the elements. With his back to the bow of the yawl, the man turned to glance over his shoulder as he handled a pair of oars.

"Don't run me down!" shouted the stranger. "Stop and take me aboard in heaven's name."

Ab Perkins had already swiftly caught up a coil of rope, which he deftly poised for a clean throw.

"We stop for nothing—mark that!" called First Officer Perkins, firmly. "Catch this rope, or we've got to leave you behind!"

The yawl was drifting by, and barely thirty feet from the motor yacht's hull, when Ab made the throw. He was a master at such feats. The coil unspread as it went whirling through the air, and a length lay across the yawl.

"Get it! Grab it!" panted sympathetic Ab.

The stranger just managed the feat, leaping up and holding on as though for dear life, while the yawl, checked in its headway, was swung around. Desperately the stranger bent down, taking a hitch with the rope. The bow watch had sprung to help Ab make fast the inside end of the line.

"There you've got it," called Ab, cheerfully. As the "Panther" was going but eight miles

an hour the stranger was able, without risk, to haul the small boat in alongside.

"Can you climb?" Ab called down, in a low voice.

"I—I think so."

"Only a few feet needed, then we can reach your arm-pits," Ab called, encouragingly.

It was not long ere young Perkins and the bow watch were able to help the stranger aboard.

The young first officer's first thought, on seeing the yawl sweep into view, was that a trick had been attempted by the enemy, for the "Victor" had recently slipped ahead. But Ab's first glimpse at the stern of the yawl showed the name, painted in goodly black letters, "S. S. Dolbear." In the bottom of the yawl lay two life preservers bearing the same name.

"How on earth do you come to be away out here at sea, in a small boat?" demanded Ab of the stranger.

"I was a freight clerk aboard the liner 'Dolbear,' bound from Auckland, New Zealand, to San Francisco," replied the rescued one.

"What happened to the 'Dolbear'?"

"Foundered, five days ago. Life boats crowded, so that the last three of us had to take to the yawl. We tried to keep up with

the other boats, but fell behind the first night. Next morning we were alone on the ocean. After two days one man in our party became crazed and jumped over into the sea. Last night the other man with me did the same. Oh, it was a gruesome experience, I assure you."

"It must have been," returned Ab Perkins, sympathetically.

"Sir, that yawl is bumping alongside," broke in the bow watch.

"Cut her loose, then, and let her drift," ordered Ab. "We can't be encumbered with any useless lumber. Then return to your watch. Mr. Costigan, warn the engine room to increase our speed as much as you find necessary. We can't let the 'Victor' go on getting ahead of us. Run right up parallel again."

"Yes, sir," from the third officer.

"You're hungry, I suppose," suggested Ab, looking at the stranger. "I'll pass word for our second stew——"

"I guess I shall be hungry when I get it fully through my head that I'm safe," laughed the rescued one. "Just at present I'd rather go below and warm myself."

Ab blew his mate's whistle for the third seaman of the watch.

"My man," he directed, "take this man

down to the motor room. Tell Mr. Randolph it will be all right for Mr.——”

“Cragthorpe is my name,” supplied the stranger.

“Tell Mr. Randolph it will be all right for Mr. Cragthorpe to dry himself off in the engine room,” continued First Officer Perkins. “When you get hungry, come up on deck. Mr. Costigan will see that you’re fed if I’m not here.”

The rescued one, after offering profuse thanks, was led below by the seaman guide.

“Mr. Costigan, what do you know about the ‘Dolbear’?” called up Ab, softly.

“She belongs to the New Zealand line, and is due in ‘Frisco about this present time,” replied the third officer from the bridge.

“Then it’s all right, as far as Cragthorpe goes?”

“I think so, sir.”

“All I wanted,” Ab finished, “was to be easy in my mind that the stranger didn’t come from the ‘Victor.’ Don’t let us get at all astern again, Mr. Costigan.”

“I won’t, sir.”

In the meantime Jeff Randolph, sitting out through a long and lonely watch in the engine room, was not sorry to see company coming his way.

For some time they chatted together. Cragthorpe seemed greatly interested in finding such young officers aboard the motor yacht. He asked many questions about the Motor Boat Club.

At last Jeff Randolph rose, excusing himself and stepping just outside the engine room door, though lingering near enough to hear a signal from the bridge, if one came. The young assistant engineer wanted to stretch his legs after sitting a long time by the motors. No sooner was the motor boat boy out of sight than the stranger rose swiftly. Snatching up a wrench, he prowled about the motors as though looking for something.

At last he evidently discovered what he wanted. Instantly he laid the wrench on a bolt-head.

CHAPTER XIV

MR. CRAGTHORPE IS MORE THAN TROUBLESOME

LUCKILY, at that moment, the Florida boy turned about, glancing into the engine room.

What he saw made Jeff stare, then gasp. Both operations were over in the space of a second.

"Here, you infernal rascal!" shouted Jeff. "Stop it!"

Nor did he content himself with that startled roar. The Florida boy carried his fighting pluck with him at all times.

Though Cragthorpe was about half as large again as the young assistant engineer, Randolph made a direct spring for him.

Cragthorpe didn't have time to complete his mischief to the engine just then.

Instead, he swung around, aiming the wrench at Jeff's head. But young Randolph halted, instantly picked up another wrench, and sent it whizzing.

Boiling with wrath, the Florida boy didn't aim particularly. He didn't care where his wrench landed, provided that it served the purpose.

The flying missile struck hard against the knuckles of Cragthorpe's right hand, forcing him to let his own weapon drop.

Then Jeff fairly flew at the larger stranger.

"You won't play any tricks while I'm here on watch," panted Jeff Randolph, as he clinched with his adversary. So impetuous was the Florida boy's assault that he carried Cragthorpe down to the floor.

There, locked in each other's arms, they rolled and fought. The pit in which the

motors stood was railed off, preventing their fighting their way into the moving machinery.

Both combatants displayed a good deal of staying power. For the first sixty seconds they fought without either seeming to gain any advantage. It was a grim, lonely duel, in which neither could accept less than complete victory.

No word was spoken. Neither cared to waste breath in speech. Jeff fought for a strangle hold as his best chance. Cragthorpe tried to get in a blow between the boy's eyes.

Once Randolph got briefly on top, but the stranger rolled over on him, and then the fighting went on more furiously than ever.

However, the stranger's superior weight and a considerable advantage in muscle soon told over the Florida boy's clear, savage grit. Though he would not yield an inch, Jeff had to admit to himself that he could not hope to hold out much longer.

After another sixty seconds of it, during which the Florida boy was breathing sorely, Cragthorpe managed to free one hand. Raising the clenched fist with the swiftness of lightning, he brought that fist down, aiming the blow to land on Jeff's forehead just above his eyes.

The blow fell, though glancingly. Now there came a quick step behind the stranger.

With a brutal oath, Cragthorpe sprang up to

confront the burning glance of Captain Tom Halstead.

Halstead had just come on deck again, after his nap. Learning from Ab about the stranger, and quick to suspect, under such circumstances, the young motor boat skipper had hastened below.

“Caught you, you sneak, didn’t I?” jeered Tom, harshly, dodging back and shedding his deck ulster with almost a single motion.

Then the young captain of the “Panther” threw himself on guard. Not an instant too soon, for Cragthorpe had sprung forward to grapple with him.

The two fists of the young skipper, moving with lightning-like rapidity, caused Cragthorpe to retreat, throwing up his own hands as soon as he saw it was to be a game of fisticuffs.

As Tom crouched low, Cragthorpe attempted to leap in over his guard. It was good tactics for one three inches taller. Yet Halstead was no novice in boxing. He threw up his left on guard, holding back his assailant, then tried to cut under and up with his right. He landed, though not with much force, against Cragthorpe’s ribs. It was enough to drive the older combatant back until he could alter his guard.

In the meantime, Jeff lay on the floor, further forward in the engine room. The Florida

boy had not wholly lost consciousness, but he was half-dazed, seeking to remember what had happened.

Now, at it again went Halstead and his enemy, each sparring cautiously, each alternately retreating or forcing the other all around the open part of the engine room.

Once Cragthorpe caught Tom near the railing, and let drive hard with both fists, seeking to push the young skipper over the railing and in among the moving machinery.

But Tom dodged artfully as he parried and struck back, and in an instant more was away from his perilous position.

Not once did the young skipper think of calling upon Cragthorpe to quit it and surrender. Halstead knew the fellow was there for too serious business to allow himself to be talked to a standstill.

At last, as Cragthorpe retreated past him, almost stepping on the young assistant engineer's face, Jeff rallied his senses enough to recall what had happened.

For a few moments Tom Halstead cleverly fought his opponent forward, putting up effective parries and raining in his blows so fast that Cragthorpe had all he could do to save himself from being floored.

In those few moments Jeff managed to crawl

past both, and down toward the engine room door.

The tide of battle turned, now, briefly at least. Cragthorpe, stung to greater fury by a glancing blow on the end of his nose, hurled himself into the fray with so much added energy that Halstead was compelled to give ground.

"Jeff, can you understand me?" panted Tom, as he retreated, an inch at a time, keeping his fists moving fast.

"Y-yes," stammered the Florida boy, still a bit dazed.

"Then pass the word for help, like a flash!"

But Jeff lingered by the doorway, holding to the frame for support. Only one thing was plain in the Florida boy's mind—that running away wasn't in his line.

"A-a-h!" vented Cragthorpe, gleefully. He had suddenly closed in quickly on Halstead, aiming a blow that it seemed must send the young captain to the floor senseless.

And so it would have done—only Tom wasn't there. He ducked low, passing under Cragthorpe's extended arm, and came up behind him, forcing the stranger to wheel about.

That left the rascal with his back turned to the Florida boy.

Jeff's mind was becoming a bit clearer every

instant. Now he left the doorway, gliding forward.

Tom saw Jeff's new move, and half-guessed the meaning of it. By clever sparring the young skipper held Cragthorpe just where he stood, until——

Jeff leaped upon the big stranger from behind. He wound his arms around Cragthorpe's throat, then held on with all the strength he could summon.

Another oath escaped the wretch's lips. It was stopped by Halstead's right fist landing across his mouth.

"This is a gentleman's boat—no profanity allowed," mocked Tom, sending in another blow that struck his man in the region of the belt, causing him to double up in torment.

Two more blows Tom drove in. Cragthorpe sank to the floor.

"Let go of him, Jeff. I can handle him," ordered Captain Tom. "Get to the speaking tube and direct Mr. Costigan to send the extra deckhand down here on the jump."

Cragthorpe lay on the floor. The fight was not by any means driven out of him, but the wind was, for the moment, at least. Then steps were heard. Mr. Costigan himself came in, followed by the extra deck-hand, for Ab had relieved the third mate on the bridge.

“So that’s what our new gentleman has been doing, is it, sir?” demanded Mr. Costigan, his Irish quickness enabling him to guess much at the first glance.

“Have you handcuffs with you, Mr. Costigan?” asked Tom.

“I have, sir.”

“Then put them on this fellow.”

With a right good will Mr. Costigan and the sailor rolled Cragthorpe over, not very gently at that, and forced his wrists together, manacled the wretch. Then they dragged him to his feet.

“Jupiter!” muttered Tom, staring hard. “I’ve seen this fellow somewhere before. And now I have it! By Jove, he’s the gallant fellow I had to knock from the observation platform on the Overland Mail!”

“You needn’t be quite so glad. We haven’t quite evened our account yet,” snarled the fellow. “But I’m not the man you think I am.”

“Do you deny you’re the fellow I struck on the observation platform of a car of the Overland Mail the other day?” Tom Halstead snorted.

“I can’t be. I’ve just come from Auckland,” leered the fellow.

“We picked him up from a small boat that bore the name of the liner, ‘Dolbear,’ ” inter-

jected Mr. Costigan. "The 'Dolbear' is due about now from Auckland."

"Then the boat was painted, as to her name, on board the 'Victor,' " said Tom. "I understand we ran behind her a bit at one time this afternoon."

"Yes, sir."

"It's from the 'Victor' this fellow came, then, boat and all," declared Captain Halstead, positively. "Now, bring the fellow up on deck and let everyone have a look at him."

As it was time to call the new watch up, anyway, this was now done. Cragthorpe tried to make a fight against being taken to the deck, but, manacled as he was, he could put up no effective resistance.

The cabin passengers, too, were called. Tom and Jeff stated the case against the fellow.

"Of course you're justified in locking this man up in the brig, if there is one aboard," observed Mr. Jephson.

"Yes; there's a brig on board," Tom nodded, "and that's where a man goes after trying to tamper with our engines on a chase like this."

The "brig" is a ship's prison. On the "Panther" it was a small room, not more than five by seven feet, with two berths and two stools in it. The door was an iron grating. Even on a yacht a brig is often needed, as a

place of confinement for a drunken or crazy sailor.

Dick Davis ascended to the bridge to stand the new watch.

"Take the fellow to the brig, Mr. Costigan, and see that he's securely locked in. Collins, see that the man gets his meals three times a day."

"I'll make you mighty sorry for this, you boy skipper!" growled Cragthorpe, as he was led away.

"That's the fellow I knocked from the train, isn't it, Joe?" demanded Halstead, turning to his chum.

"He's not dressed as well, and he has a few days' growth of beard on his face, but I'm positive he's the same fellow," answered Joe Dawson, quietly.

CHAPTER XV

THE MIDNIGHT ALARM

"**S**TILL the sound of machinery," muttered Dick Davis, pacing the bridge just before dark. "I imagine the skipper of that other craft wishes he could have put a mute on his engines."

"He has even taken to blowing his fog-horn

again," replied young Halstead. "It's just sheer luck that he hasn't been run down by some vessel coming from the opposite direction."

"I guess our fog-horn has protected him," suggested Dick. "We may have passed some other craft whose fog-horns didn't carry sound as far as ours. Hearing our fog-horn, such vessels might have given us such a wide berth that the 'Victor' naturally escaped collision."

It was about eight o'clock, when Tom and Joe were finishing the evening meal in the captain's cabin, that a sudden sharp blast came through the bridge speaking tube.

"Right here at the other end, Mr. Davis," Captain Tom answered.

"I think you'll be interested in coming to the bridge, sir. The fog is lightening a bit, and I can see a couple of stars overhead."

"Whew! That's good news! Do you still hear the 'Victor's' machinery?"

"Yes; I've been keeping very close to her."

Halstead quickly told the news to Joe Dawson. Both reached for their ulsters, then ran out on deck. Tom's first discovery was that he could hear, distinctly, the subdued clank-clank made by the invisible steam yacht.

Yes; the fog was surely lifting. Overhead, especially, things were clearing.

"We seem to be running out at the edge of the fog-bank, Mr. Davis," was the young captain's greeting, as he climbed to the bridge, followed by the young chief engineer.

For five minutes or more Tom Halstead stood there, watching the fog.

"I'm sure enough of the news, now, to go aft and tell Mr. Baldwin," he declared, finally.

Tom found all the cabin passengers at table in the deck dining saloon, aft of the owner's quarters. They were not more than two-thirds through the meal, but the table became instantly deserted.

Twenty minutes later the watchers at the port rail made out, briefly, a part of the hull of the "Victor." The two craft were but little more than two hundred yards apart.

Ten minutes later both craft passed almost completely out of the fog. A cheer went up from the deck of the "Panther." There was no answer from the pursued craft.

Running up to the bridge, and snatching up a megaphone, Joseph Baldwin bawled lustily:

"We're still with you, you pirates! You can't shake us!"

Still no sound of human voice came from the steam yacht. The answer was of another sort. Great clouds of smoke began to pour from the "Victor's" funnel.

“They’re going to try a spurt,” chuckled Halstead, gleefully. “Well, let ’em. *We* don’t even have to get up more steam for a spurt. All we have to do is to feed in the gasoline quicker.”

Within five minutes the “Victor” was racing along at more than twenty miles an hour. On board the “Panther,” however, Joe Dawson did not even feel it necessary to go below to look at the motors. Jed Prentiss was down there in the engine room, and Jed was a boy who knew what he was doing. Second Officer Davis gave the speed orders from the bridge; Jed carried out the orders. The “Panther,” now widening the interval to four hundred yards in this clearer atmosphere, ran along parallel with the steam yacht.

“They may fool us yet,” chuckled Halstead, turning around to the owner. “But they’ll have to do it with something better than speed.”

“If they get away from *you*, Captain Halstead,” replied the owner, his face beaming, “I promise, in advance, to forgive you. It won’t be your fault. Lord, how you’ve hung to them! What a report I shall have to send Delavan on the officers he sent me!”

Then, suddenly, Halstead thought of the prisoner down in the brig.

"Pass the word for Second Steward Collins," he directed, and that yacht's servant soon reported.

"You didn't forget to feed the prisoner, Collins?"

"Oh, no, sir," and the steward rattled off the names of the dishes that had been supplied the man in the brig.

"He seems to have fed nearly as well as we did," laughed Skipper Tom. "Well, that's right; just because we lock a fellow up is no reason why we should starve him. The prisoner had a good appetite?"

"Excellent, sir."

"He's locked in tightly?"

"Yes, sir."

Ten minutes later Captain Halstead took the trouble to go below to the brig.

It was somewhat stuffy down there, but that couldn't be helped.

From the center of the ceiling a single incandescent lamp supplied the illumination of the room.

As Tom Halstead peered in through the grating he saw Cragthorpe seated on a stool in the far corner.

Tom did not speak. The fellow glared at him, then looked away.

"The door is locked tightly, all right," mur-

mured Captain Halstead to himself, after rattling the bars and examining the lock.

No sooner had he turned away, and stepped out of sight, than Cragthorpe rose like a caged tiger. A leer expressive of the utmost cruelty parted his teeth. He shook his fist menacingly after the departing young skipper. He was able to do that much, for Mr. Costigan, following the usual course in such cases, had removed the handcuffs after depositing the prisoner in the brig.

“Perhaps you think I’m here, simply awaiting your pleasure, my young salt water cub!” snarled Cragthorpe to himself.

Tom Halstead, however, gave the fellow little further thought. He was too happy over the lifting of the fog. It is possible for two craft of the size of these to run all day within two hundred yards of each other through a fog, judging each other’s positions only by sounds. The slow speed of fog-time makes this possible. Yet it requires splendidly expert seamanship on both craft. The ordeal is bound to be wearing on the deck and watch officers. Tom and his three mates felt utterly tired after their experience, but the passing out of the belt of the fog had brought huge relief to them.

Up to ten o’clock that evening the “Victor” maintained her fast speed. The air was now

thoroughly clear in every direction. Tom could have kept the other craft in sight even had the steam yacht shown no lights. But the commander of the "Victor" had all his running lights going.

"You'll call us, if anything whatever happens that's worth our knowing, won't you, Captain?" asked Joseph Baldwin, joining the young sailing master, who stood close to the bridge steps on the port side.

"Yes, sir. Certainly."

"All of us chaps in the cabin are going to turn in soon," continued Mr. Baldwin, with a slight yawn. "We're fagged, both from the lack of sleep and the suspense. Now, however, our minds are easier. Yonder is the boat that carries Frank Rollings and the millions he stole from the bank. Our fuel will last as long as theirs will. We can follow as far as they can go."

"Wouldn't it be a jarring surprise if it turned out that we've been following a dummy, Mr. Baldwin?" Halstead asked. "What if we follow for days and days, yet, and then learn that neither Rollings nor his plunder is on board?"

Joseph Baldwin started, then retorted:

"Yes; but it won't happen, Captain. In the first place, the detectives of the Bankers' As-

sociation found out positively that Rollings had gone aboard, and that the yacht had then got under way at once. The captain of that boat was expecting Rollings—was prepared for him—and has the defaulter on board at this moment.”

“I hope so, sir, for I’m satisfied that we’re yet going to lay alongside of that craft and search her.”

“Of course we are. Good night, Captain.”

“Good night, sir. I’m going to turn in, myself, for a while.”

Half an hour later the young skipper was sound asleep. So, for that matter, were all the officers and crew who were not on duty.

Sky and surrounding atmosphere continued clear through the rest of Dick Davis’s watch on the bridge. That young second mate was pacing back and forth contentedly. The two yachts, now making about a fourteen-mile speed, were close together, and Davis had little to watch save the general handling of the boat.

Out of a hatchway forward a head was cautiously thrust up. Davis did not happen to see that head. There was no reason why he should be looking for it.

The owner of that head saw Davis turn and pace over to starboard. Swiftly, and silently, the man sprang out of the hatchway, after ob-

serving that the quartermaster's head was bent over the compass. The sailor in the wheel house with the quartermaster was not looking in Davis's direction at the moment.

So the prowler gained the port side of the deck-house, and stole aft without hindrance. It was Cragthorpe, the late prisoner in the brig. Now, besides being free, he carried a five-gallon can of gasoline that he had found below deck.

Away back to the after deck he ran, crouching low. There he halted, staring about him. An evil smile flickered over his lips. With little conscience, he was also without fear for himself.

An instant later he began sprinkling gasoline about him. The task was quickly accomplished. He drew out a box of blazer matches, striking one of them and tossing it down where a pool of gasoline lay.

There was a flare, in a second, but Cragthorpe had vanished almost as quickly as the flare appeared.

Dick Davis caught a glimpse of the glow.

"Quartermaster, send your man aft to investigate a blaze there. Let him run!"

The blaze, however, was spreading and mounting so fast that the alert young second officer did not have to pause to guess.

"Fire!" shouted the sailor, running forward. But Dick Davis had already sprung to the alarm bells.

CHAPTER XVI

THE FIRE DRILL IN EARNEST

THE sailor's cry of "Fire," the most dreaded that can rise at sea, disturbed Captain Tom Halstead's sound rest. He half awoke.

Then it sounded again:

"Fire!"

In prompt confirmation of the cry, the electric bell began ringing in his room. Directly over it glowed an electric light in a red bulb—the fire signal to the cabin.

Tom Halstead fairly leaped from his bed. He got on all the clothing needed with the speed of a fireman.

Dick Davis's hand had come, first, to the bell rousing the watch below. He rang that first, but Halstead's bell immediately afterward.

As Halstead burst open the door of his cabin the red glow was in his face.

Down in the mates' and crew's quarters the fire-bell was ringing steadily. Officers and men came tumbling up the stairs.

“Stand by the handling of the ship, Mr. Davis!” roared the young captain from the deck. “I’ll have men enough for the fighting of the fire.”

As the first heads showed from below, Halstead roared:

“Mr. Perkins, the starboard hose. Mr. Costigan, the port! Two men each and yourselves to a hose. The rest report to me.”

The hose lay in butts from which they were lifted and fastened to the deck hydrants. While one man was securing each hose to a hydrant, a mate and another sailor ran aft with the line along either rail.

“The rest of you get fire axes,” shouted Captain Halstead. “Jump up onto the bridge and go aft over the deck-house. Mr. Davis, instruct Mr. Prentiss to connect the pump in the engine room. Tell him to give us instant pressure.”

Though he had heard the fire call, Jed was too dependable to allow either curiosity or fear to take him from his post. When the order came, through the speaking tube, young Prentiss was standing by, ready to connect the pump with one of the motors.

Through the two lengths of hose the water leaped almost instantly.

Captain Tom had run with his axe-men over the deck-house.

He found the after deck ablaze, and also the sides of the deck-house aft.

How it had all happened the young sailing master did not trouble himself to ask, at first. It was more than enough for him to know that there was a fire aboard, and to know where it was located.

“Get up close, Mr. Perkins and Mr. Costigan!” he shouted, from the top of the deck-house. “Let the flames have the water at full, direct pressure. Steady, now! Throw in every drop of water where it will hit the hottest, highest flames.”

Seldom had fire-drill at sea been more promptly or intelligently carried out. It was fortunate, at the very outset, that the blaze had started so near the time for the changing of the watches. The men were rested and ready for prompt rising.

The slight rolling of the boat carried gasoline along the decks, bearing the flames with it. A pitching at the bow, slight though it was, brought these running streams of flame down upon the crews with the hose. They had to depress the nozzles almost at their feet, in order to assure themselves of safe standing room.

“Give me one of those axes,” shouted Halstead, taking the implement from a sailor. “Now, two of you jump down aft with me on

the deck. Never mind the fire! Remember, we've got to fight it for our lives anyway!"

Down into the clearest spot he could find young Halstead leaped. Ab Perkins, seeing him, turned the stream full on the blazing deck around the young sailing master. That was all that saved Halstead from perishing. The water kept the flames down so that he was able to lay about him, loosening several of the deck planks.

One of the sailors had landed close beside the young skipper. He, too, laid about him. The second seaman, however, ran over to the other side of the deck-house, looking for some spot where he might work protected by the other hose.

The hoarse shouting of orders, the running of feet overhead and the sharp, sinister hiss of water coming in contact with fire, all combined to arouse the owner of the imperiled yacht.

Joseph Baldwin sprang from his bed, dashed aside the starboard curtains, and caught a reflection of the glow.

"Fire!" he gasped, turning pale. "Halstead and his comrades surely have enough to handle this time."

Then, with frenzied haste, the owner fell to pulling on his clothes. He, too, broke some of his own records in the matter of dressing. In a very few moments he was outside, and climbing the bridge steps. Then he dashed aft.

The breeze that was blowing was unfavorable to the fire fighters. The factors in their favor, however, were the prompt discovery of the trouble and the thinness with which the gasoline was spread.

The blaze was at its worst in the middle of the after deck. It was the realization of this fact that had caused young Captain Halstead to take the desperate leap and make the bold effort that now stood to his credit.

"That boy has no sense of fear," cried Mr. Baldwin to himself.

As a matter of fact, Halstead had escaped unscorched. His promptness, good judgment, and the protecting streams from the hose had saved him from disastrous consequences that might be expected to follow such a hazardous act.

By now the hosemen were able to get far enough aft to wet down the blazing parts of the wall of the after deck-house.

Within five minutes from the time it started the blaze was brought down to where it required only persistent hosing to drown it completely.

From time to time a sudden gust of the light breeze fanned up the fire briefly at some point, but the fire fighters no longer feared for their safety.

Mr. Ross and Dr. Gray had been aroused by the sounds of fire-fighting; the others in the

cabin staterooms slept on, for Dick Davis had wisely refrained from touching the button that would have sounded the heavy gong in the main cabin.

"How could the thing have started?" asked Mr. Ross, bewilderedly.

"It was set, by someone," replied Tom Halstead, joining Mr. Baldwin and the latter's friends. "It was a gasoline blaze, pure and simple."

"Who could have——" began Dr. Gray.

"I saw myself that the prisoner was safely locked in," broke in the young skipper. "Yet he's the only one I could suspect."

Almost at a run Halstead started forward, followed by Ab Perkins.

Down below, these two investigators found the door of the brig open. The lock had been picked. On the floor of the brig Tom found what was left of a steel table fork such as the crew used.

"He forced the tines and shank out of the handle, and worked it over into a pick-lock," muttered the young skipper. "I respect the fellow's ingenuity, if nothing else."

But where was Cragthorpe himself? Two searching parties, one under Ab and the other commanded by Third Officer Costigan, searched until Dick Davis, still on the bridge past his hour, broke in with:

“Why, Captain, you can guess what became of the fellow? When our blaze was under way the ‘Victor’ turned and steamed nearer to us. The rascal jumped overboard, of course, swam back and was picked up. It must have been all part of a plan. At any rate, when the watch officer on the steam yacht saw the blaze on board this craft, he knew well enough what it meant, and stood by to rescue the Cragthorpe fellow.”

“That’s what has happened to him,” nodded Mr. Baldwin. “He’s safe again with the other rascals.”

So the searching parties were recalled, the new watch was set, and quiet at last settled down over the yacht.

It was two o’clock in the morning when Tom Halstead again sought his rest. That fire had stirred him up so that he did not at once feel drowsy. A fire at sea, on a gasoline motor yacht, is a trebly serious affair. If the flames ever get close to the gasoline supply the blaze is almost certain to wind up abruptly in a fearful, devastating explosion.

“I’ve had some lively times at sea, before this,” the young skipper muttered, “but this voyage has already gone ahead of anything I’ve ever had happen at sea. I hope we’re through with visitors from the ‘Victor.’ ”

At last he closed his eyes and slept, for Hal-

stead was not a highly nervous youngster. When he was free from the demands of duty, and physically tired, he was not usually long in finding his rest.

Even in his sleep the lad did not lie quietly. He began to toss and thrash, dreaming that he was fighting it out again with Cragthorpe. It was like a nightmare, for, in his dream, the young captain of the "Panther" felt himself to be getting the worst of the struggle.

Then, all of a sudden, Tom Halstead awoke, roused by a sensation of choking. A man knelt over him in his bed. Halstead's hands were lashed, while a rope was noosed about his neck.

On the front wall of the cabin was a ship's clock. A shaded light burned near the dial of the clock, giving illumination to enable one to read the clock's dial from the bed.

That light also showed Tom the face and figure of his present oppressor—Cragthorpe, in the flesh!

"Now, we're going to have a chance to talk over the other side of this question!" chuckled the wretch, in Tom's ear. "I remained aboard—risked everything—in order to have this precious meeting. Just us two here—fine, isn't it?"

CHAPTER XVII

CRAGTHORPE INTRODUCES HIS REAL SELF

“**N**OW, if you find you’ve anything to say,” continued Cragthorpe, in the same low voice, “you can say it when the time comes. But don’t try to call out, and don’t attempt any impudence, or I’ll pull this noose tight. You know what that will mean!”

Undeniably Tom Halstead paled. Upon his feet, with at least a fighting chance, the young motor boat captain, while he might have feared death, would not have run away from it. He had a record for showing grit.

But this was a time when no amount of courage could give him a chance. He read it in Cragthorpe’s eyes that the fellow intended to keep the upper hand, and to abuse it, to the end.

“You felt fine and important when you told that big Irishman to lead me off to the brig, didn’t you?” began the tormentor.

“What else could I do?” demanded Halstead, in a low voice. “Wouldn’t you have done the same by me, if the boot had been on the other foot?”

“And you struck me that cowardly blow over at Oakland the other day,” cried Cragthorpe,

who seemed to have nursed his wrath until it angered him to the striking point.

"When you went to school," mocked Tom, his coolness returning rapidly, "you studied out of a different book of definitions from the one I had. I was never taught that it was cowardice to defend a woman."

"What call had you to defend her?" insisted Cragthorpe, with a show of increasing anger. "Was it any of your affair?"

"Yes; the fact that the young woman was annoyed by you was excuse enough for my act."

"You spoiled my last chance with her when you humiliated me by a blow that I didn't get a chance to return at the time."

"I'm glad to hear that," retorted Tom, candidly.

"Oh, you are, are you?"

The working of passion in Cragthorpe's face was a fearful sight to see.

"And a fine thing you did for the young woman!" hissed the fellow. "I wanted to marry her. She has money enough to make her a prize," sneered the wretch. "Her brother is to go on trial for his life in a few days, and I am the only witness who could save him from the chain of evidence that the authorities are weaving about him. I made the offer to the girl to save her brother if she would wed me."

“You cowardly—cur!” uttered Tom Halstead, in cool disdain.

Cragthorpe started; then deeper lines of passion graved themselves in his features.

“Yes,” continued Tom, scornfully, “you’re about the lowest sort of cur that could possibly breathe. To charge a woman such a price for her brother’s life and good fame!”

Cragthorpe suddenly restrained his growing anger. He leered down into the face of his straightforward young enemy.

“However, I am to make money in another way,” he continued, cheerfully. “Frank Rollings is my cousin. After my failure with the girl he found me so desperate and ugly that, without telling me what he was about to do, he enlisted me in his present fine enterprise.”

“Took you along with him to help him guard his stolen treasure, did he?” jeered Captain Tom Halstead.

“Yes, if it interests you,” snarled Cragthorpe.

“It’ll interest your precious cousin a lot more, before he gets through with you,” sneered Halstead. “He’ll be lucky if you don’t make away with him and try to secure all the stolen money for yourself!”

Cragthorpe started, almost as though the young skipper had hit on the head the nail of his intentions.

“Here! Chew on this, instead of words!” flashed the wretch.

He suddenly forced the young skipper’s mouth open, wedging in a crumpled up handkerchief. This he followed with another, gagging his victim.

Scenting more dastardly work to come, Tom Halstead fought furiously with the little chance that was left to him. His hands were secured, in front of him, but his feet and legs were free. He struggled with all his might, trying to use his bound hands, together, on the head of Cragthorpe, as that wretch again bent over him.

In his struggles Halstead rolled over on his side. His lashed hands reached briefly under the edge of the bed. In this way he hoped to gain purchase enough to pull himself free and yank himself to his feet. It was a slight hope, yet the only one the motor boat boy could see.

In the brief interval before Cragthorpe seized him roughly, hurling him back into the middle of the bed, Tom’s hands touched something on the under side of the frame. He didn’t know what it was he had touched.

In that brief though furious struggle Halstead had succeeded in working out the handkerchiefs. His oppressor caught up one of them.

“I’ll gag you in better shape, this time,” he proposed.

At that instant the door of the cabin opened. Cragthorpe, busy with his scheme of revenge, did not hear it. But Halstead lay so that he saw the door move ajar; he saw the head of the sailor who, with this watch, served in the wheel-house.

Over the seaman's face swept a look of the most intense amazement. He darted back into the darkness, for an instant, then returned.

"One moment—wait!" spoke Tom Halstead, sharply.

"Confound you—not so loud, if you value your safety!" warned Cragthorpe.

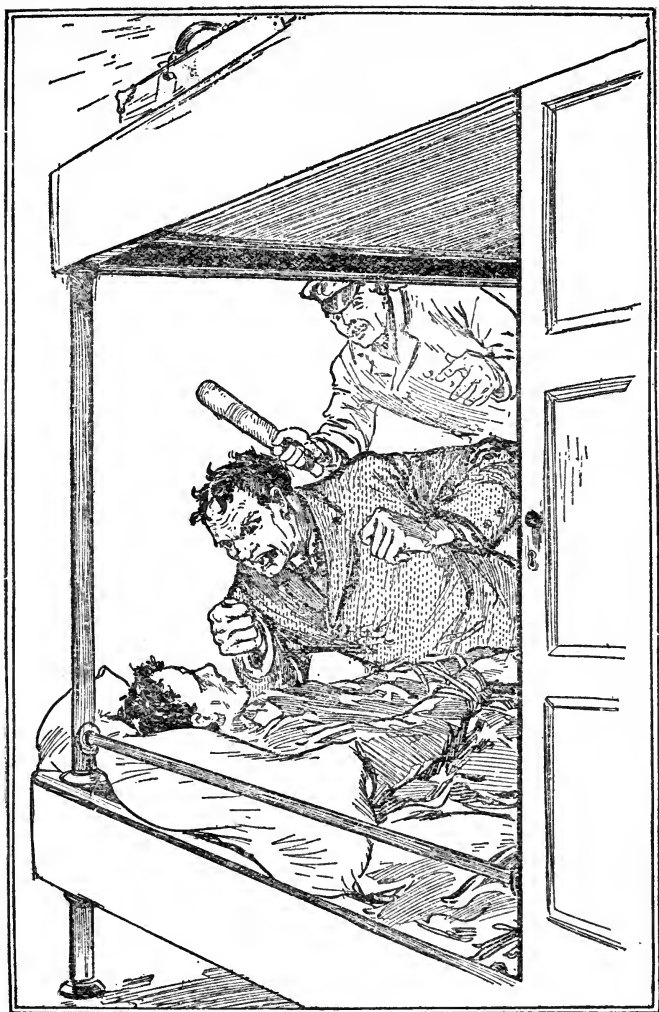
Had not the rascal been so intensely absorbed he would have felt and noted the light breeze that blew in with the opening of the door. But Cragthorpe was passion-ridden at the moment. The door closed, with the sailor and Third Officer Costigan in the room.

That "one moment—wait!" Mr. Costigan and the sailor had the presence of mind to understand was directed at them.

"That girl—and her brother—you were lying to me about them," taunted Halstead. "You can't tell me their names."

"I can't—eh?" sneered Cragthorpe, harshly. "The girl's name is Rose Gentry, and her brother's name Robert Gentry."

"And the brother is accused of murder, and



“You Ought to Be Clubbed!”



you could prove him innocent? Yet you refused to save the brother because Rose Gentry would not marry you and let you own her fortune? It's a lie!"

"It's the truth," snarled Cragthorpe, hotly. "And you helped doom the brother when you struck me down before Rose Gentry. You made her despise me the more."

"She did well to despise you," retorted Tom Halstead, bluntly. "*You ought to be clubbed!*"

That was exactly what happened, ere Cragthorpe could open his mouth. The seaman had been crouching behind the fellow, a belaying-pin in his right hand. At the word from Halstead the sailor struck, and Cragthorpe fell to the floor, stunned.

Leaving the sailor to attend to Cragthorpe, Mr. Costigan now bounded forward to free the young captain's hands.

"How on earth did this happen, sir?" demanded the third officer, as he cut away the cord from the boy's wrists.

"I dreamed I was fighting the fellow," laughed Tom, "but woke up to find he had slipped my hands into that noose. He had this other noose around my neck, threatening to draw it uncomfortably tight if I tried to make any outcry."

Tom was now able to slip out of bed and pull

on his trousers, while Mr. Costigan turned on a stronger light.

"But how on earth did you two happen to come to my relief just at the right time?" the young skipper demanded.

"Why, you sounded the call to the bridge," retorted the third mate.

"I sounded the——wait a second."

Tom bent over the edge of his bed, feeling underneath along the frame.

"Why, there's a button here. Does that call to the bridge?" demanded the motor boat captain.

"It certainly does," retorted the third officer.

"I didn't even know the button was there," gasped the young sailing master. "In my struggles I touched it by accident."

"I sent Oleson, the sailor, to see what you wanted, sir," continued Mr. Costigan. "The next thing I knew Oleson backed out of your cabin, grabbed up a belaying-pin, and signaled to me. I came quick and soft-like, sir. And now, Captain, if you've no further orders for me, sir, hadn't I better be traveling back to the bridge? The quartermaster of my watch is running the ship at this minute."

"Go, then, Mr. Costigan, and thank you; but send the extra deck-hand of this watch."

In another moment the third mate's whistle

was sounding shrilly. It brought the extra man of the watch on the run.

"Put these handcuffs on the fellow before he comes to," ordered Tom, going to his desk and taking out a pair of manacles. "There, now he won't do much harm if he does come out of it suddenly. But I'm going with you to the brig, and want to see leg irons put on the rascal, too. He won't have the use of his hands again, on this yacht. The second steward will have to feed the fellow his meals."

Tom quickly finished his dressing. Just as he had done so Cragthorpe uttered a deep sigh and opened his eyes. He was still a bit dazed. Halstead waited for some moments before speaking.

"If you were telling the truth, fellow, about Rose Gentry and her brother," taunted Tom, "your silence won't do you so much good, now. My third officer and one of these sailors overheard your declaration of your infernal villainy. They can testify in court in behalf of young Gentry. They'll help the case quite a bit, I guess."

Cragthorpe was enough himself, by this time, to understand. He scowled blackly, but refused to speak.

"Take him along down below to the brig, now," ordered Captain Halstead.

As the three navigators and their captive

stepped out forward of the pilot house, Tom pointed over to port.

"There's the boat of your friends, my man," laughed the young motor boat skipper. "You've told me, too, that Frank Rollings is aboard of her, and that he has the stolen funds with him. Oh, one way and another, you told me a lot this night that I'm glad to know!"

Cragthorpe uttered some savage language under his breath as he was dragged below. Once again he found himself in the brig, and the door locked, after the leg-irons had been fitted. This time, to make doubly sure of his man, Halstead put on a double lock by means of a chain and padlock, the latter being of a pattern that could not be picked.

"In one way I almost feel badly at doing this to you, Cragthorpe," Tom said to the fellow, through the grating. "You'll think I'm crowing over you, and abusing my power. I'd be easier with you—but it wouldn't be safe for anyone aboard the yacht."

Halstead then returned to his cabin, where, at his desk, he wrote a note to Mr. Baldwin, advising the latter of what he had learned from the man who was once more in the brig.

This note he turned over to Mr. Costigan.

"Hand it to him if he comes on deck in the morning before I do," requested the young skip-

per. "Add anything you please, out of what you saw and heard to-night."

Then the motor yacht captain walked over to the port rail for one more look at the "Victor." The "Panther" was still keeping abreast of her, less than four hundred yards away. These two craft appeared to have the sea all to themselves.

"When, where and how will this all end?" wondered Tom Halstead.

Then he turned in once more, this time hoping for some real rest.

CHAPTER XVIII

A TRICK MADE FOR TWO

JUST before eight o'clock in the morning Tom Halstead rolled over luxuriously in his broad bed.

"One more catnap wouldn't feel half bad," he muttered to himself. "However, I reckon I feel about right. I've had some of the sleep that was coming to me."

Then:

"I wonder how my friend Cragthorpe is this morning? It's quite plain he hasn't found some other trick for getting out of the brig."

Tom yawned a couple of times, stretched, and finally decided that he felt like getting up.

While he was coming to this conclusion the whistle sounded in the bridge speaking tube.

Springing out of bed, Tom took up the mouth-piece.

"Well?" he called.

"The 'Victor' is putting about, sir."

"What's her new course?"

"Going right back over the course she came out on, sir. Shall I turn and follow?"

"What else? The only thing we're living for now, Mr. Costigan, is to keep close to that steam yacht. Follow her, without further orders, even if she starts to steaming in circles. I'll be out soon."

"Very good, sir."

Tom looked slowly about him, then headed for the bath-room. He took plenty of time in the warm water, finally dressing. Mr. Costigan's watch had gone below, the third officer having left Tom's letter with Dick Davis, to be handed to Mr. Baldwin when the latter should appear. But, so far, none of the cabin party had yet turned out.

"All our people are still abed, I think, sir," smiled Davis, when the young motor boat captain appeared on deck.

"They've been worn out, by the suspense as much as by their short hours of rest," Halstead replied.

“Now, you guess why the steam craft has put about, don’t you?” asked Halstead, after pacing the bridge for some moments while he studied the weather.

“I’m not sure that I do, sir,” Dick admitted, after a moment’s thought.

“Within three or four hours, I’m willing to wager you a night’s rest, we’ll be back in the fog belt,” Tom replied, pointing ahead. “Now, Rollings and the captain of the ‘Victor’ have felt that they were getting too far off the course to their real destination, with us tagging right alongside all the way. They knew that the fog bank was a few hours astern of them as they lay on the other course, so they’re putting back to get into it.”

“For what purpose?” asked Dick.

“Why, I suppose they’ve figured on some plan for losing us in the fog this time. That’s the way their hopes run, anyway.”

“I can’t see any fog ahead of us, sir,” proclaimed Dick. “And I thought a fellow raised on the Maine sea-coast knew all about fogs.”

“There’s Ab just coming up for the day’s work,” whispered Tom, as the young first officer appeared through the companionway forward. “Just hear what he says.”

Leaning forward over the bridge rail, Halstead called:

"Mr. Perkins, what sort of weather do you think lies ahead of us?"

Ab halted, looking all about him, then peering out for some moments past the bow of the "Panther."

"I think, sir," came the first officer's report, at last, "we're heading back towards another real old San Francisco fog."

"I surrender, then," nodded Dick Davis.

"We'll be in it by noon, or before," Tom Halstead predicted.

"And then, the folks on that craft yonder have it all figured out to give us the slip, sure and easy this time," muttered Ab, as he climbed the steps to the bridge.

Out of the owner's quarters stepped Joseph Baldwin and came forward, stretching and inhaling deeply the outdoor air. Captain Tom Halstead stepped down from the bridge to meet him.

"Haven't the other crowd changed their course a bit?" asked Mr. Baldwin.

Halstead explained the new move on the part of the navigator of the "Victor."

"Going to try to lose us, are they?" chuckled Baldwin. "If they do, Captain, they are clever people. If they can get away from *you* I'm positive it won't be your fault."

Then, stretching like a man who has had a

fine, long sleep, and who isn't yet over the enjoyment of it, the owner added:

"Thank goodness, nothing happened during the night!"

"Nothing happened in the night, eh? I'm glad it was all carried off so quietly, sir, that you weren't disturbed by it."

"Why, *did* anything happen?"

"The fire, in the first place——"

"Of course; but I meant, nothing after I turned in again."

"Something certainly did happen," laughed Halstead. "I left a note for you with the watch officer, in case you came on deck before I did. Now, however, I can tell you about it."

And that Tom Halstead proceeded to do. While he was still engaged in the narration Mr. Ross came up on deck, and had to hear the tale. Just at its finish Dr. Gray appeared, followed by Gaston Giddings. The latter young man, though wholly out of the influence of morphine now, looked seedy and sullen. Plainly, he resented his enforced abstinence from drugs.

"I want to see that infernal rascal, Cragthorpe," muttered Mr. Baldwin. "Captain, won't you be good enough to have him brought on deck?"

So Ab was summoned, and instructed to take

the extra seaman of the watch, as well as Quartermaster Bickson, and bring the prisoner to deck.

"Bring him by force, if you have to," added Captain Tom, dryly.

In a short time the quartermaster and seaman appeared, all but dragging Cragthorpe, while Ab Perkins brought up the rear of the procession, giving the doubly manacled fellow an occasional shove.

It was the first time that Gaston Giddings had seen the prisoner. The instant he did so, now, the young bank president looked suddenly angry.

"Mr. Baldwin," demanded Gaston Giddings, "why is this gentleman under such restraint?"

"*Gentleman?*" demanded Baldwin, with withering scorn. "Why, my boy, about whom are you talking?"

"Why is Mr. Cragthorpe ironed, on board this yacht?" insisted Giddings, his face now white and stern with increasing anger.

"Well, then, I'll tell you," sniffed Joseph Baldwin. "That fellow is in irons because he joined us from the 'Victor.' His first enterprise on board was to try to put one of our motors out of the running. His next effort was to set this yacht on fire, last night. After that, he broke into Captain Halstead's cabin, pre-

sumably with the intention of killing the navigator of this yacht; at any rate, he meant to injure Captain Halstead severely. Those are some of the reasons, Giddings, my boy, why Cragthorpe is now guarded as carefully as a mad dog might be if we didn't possess the right to kill it."

While speaking, Joseph Baldwin studied the young bank president's face keenly. After a pause, the older man went on:

"And now, Giddings, if you concede that I have any right to be curious, in turn, I'd like to ask you why you are so intensely interested in this scoundrel?"

From the instant Cragthorpe had caught sight of the face of Gaston Giddings, the man in irons had stood more at ease, a sneer on his face.

"Cragthorpe is a friend of mine," replied Giddings, stiffly.

"Indeed? Then I regret to say that I can't congratulate you on your choice of friends."

"I demand that you set Mr. Cragthorpe free!" cried young Giddings, in a voice passionate with anger.

"That's a request, my boy, that I'm not at all inclined to grant, even had I the power," retorted Baldwin, coolly, yet speaking as though he did not wish needlessly to further

rouse the anger of Giddings. "You see, I haven't any power to give the order."

"No power?" snorted Giddings. "Don't you own this yacht?"

"I do; but Halstead is her captain. It is one of the rules of the sea that, after a vessel leaves her anchorage, her captain commands her absolutely until port is again reached."

"Do you mean to say that this boy would refuse to free Cragthorpe, if you commanded it?" demanded Giddings, hotly, a flushed spot burning in either cheek.

"What would you say, Captain Halstead, if I demanded the release of the prisoner?" asked Baldwin, facing the young motor boat skipper with smiling eyes.

"I'd refuse, sir," Tom replied, promptly. "In my opinion the 'Panther' isn't safe a minute when Cragthorpe is out of the brig. Take the prisoner back to the brig, Mr. Perkins."

Gaston Giddings, with a wrathful cry, started forward, but Tom blocked his way.

"You know you're pleasing the owner you sail for, or you wouldn't dare do this thing," choked the young bank president.

The prisoner was speedily taken below.

Gaston Giddings stamped angrily aft, while Joseph Baldwin's eyes followed the young man with a wondering look.

“Mr. Perkins,” directed Tom, when Ab came back on deck, “lock the door of the passage leading to the brig, and leave the key with the watch officer, with instructions to turn it over to his successor on the bridge.” Tom’s order was given for the purpose of preventing Giddings from making any attempt to reach and aid Cragthorpe.

“I’m going to have Doc Gray try to find out what part Cragthorpe has been playing in the life of our young friend, Giddings,” Mr. Baldwin confided to the young skipper. “I’ve a suspicion, already, though.”

“May I ask, sir, what you suspect?”

“Well, since Giddings has become a confirmed ‘hop-fiend,’ and Cragthorpe comes to us from the Rollings crowd, I think it most likely that Rollings has been employing Cragthorpe to cultivate Giddings’s acquaintance and lure him on into the opium habit. Such drugs destroy a man’s will, his sense of justice—they rot his very soul!”

“So, then, sir, you think Rollings has been, for some time, engaged in a deliberate plot to acquire an ascendancy over Mr. Giddings and ruin him?”

“That’s my suspicion, stated in a few words, Captain.”

Through the forenoon the chase on the course

back to San Francisco continued without change. By eleven o'clock both yachts were moving through occasional light blotches of fog, though the two craft still moved in sight of each other. An hour later, however, the two yachts, with speed now down to eight miles an hour, entered a dense, white gloom in which they were soon shut out from sight of each other. Now, Captain Tom was reduced to the old trick of going by sound.

Fortunately, the "Victor" sounded a fog-horn at regular intervals of sixty seconds, as did the "Panther."

"I'm not going to take any chances, however, sir," Tom confided to the owner. "I'm going to keep close enough to hear her machinery, too."

Passing through the fog, the unseen "Victor" was off the better part of three hundred yards to port of the "Panther."

Of a sudden, however, there came a note that was new. Tom and Joe, in the captain's cabin, heard it, and ran out on deck. Davis was bending over the starboard rail of the bridge in his effort to comprehend the new sound.

"Too-whoo-oo!" Nearly abeam, and some three hundred yards off to starboard, that new sound came—a fog-horn identical with the "Victor's."

"What on earth is the trick, now?" wondered Joe Dawson.

"I'd be willing to give a day's pay to guess it all at once," responded the young skipper.

"Too-whoo-oo!" sounded the "Panther's" fog-horn. "Too-whoo-oo!" came the answer, from port, presumably from the "Victor's" fog-horn. "Too-whoo-oo!" came like an echo from starboard.

"It sounds like the first move in a game to mix us up," muttered Tom Halstead, shrewdly.

"But what craft can be off at starboard?" questioned young Dawson.

"Probably a steam launch, put off from the 'Victor,' with a similar fog-horn," rejoined Captain Halstead.

"Or a motor launch," suggested Joe.

"No; I don't believe that. If it were a motor launch we'd hear the chug-chug of her exhaust. It must be a steam launch. A steam craft of small size can be run more quietly."

"That's true," assented young Dawson. "Still, our power tender has a pretty silent exhaust."

"Great scheme!" grinned Tom, suddenly.

"What?"

"I'm going to play a return trick on Rollings's captain."

"How?"

"We have two reserve fog-horns that are identical in sound. I'm going to rig one of 'em on the 'Panther,' using it in the place of the one we're now sounding."

"Yes——"

"And rig the other fog-horn on the power launch," chuckled Tom. "Then we'll put Bickson and his own deckhand in the power launch and send 'em around to cruise to port of the 'Victor.' Thus we'll keep those fellows guessing, too, what's in the wind."

Joe chuckled, but he added:

"Tom, you'd better ask Mr. Jephson to send one of his deputy marshals along, armed, or something might happen that our power launch and two men would be bagged."

"That's a sound idea, too," Captain Tom nodded. Half an hour later the "Panther's" power launch, containing Bickson, a seaman and a deputy marshal, stole as noiselessly as possible around to the port side of the "Victor" in the great, thick fog. Now, there were four fog-horns, sounding all at once. The four power craft were moving practically in one line.

"Say, that's a funny stunt, surely," chuckled Joseph Baldwin, when he heard the four fog-horns almost at once, and understood what the move meant.

"It may have another good effect," suggested Halstead.

"What?"

"Any sailing vessel headed our way, hearing four horns, is likely to steer well out of the way of the whole fleet, thus lessening the danger of collision."

Barely two minutes later another sound intensely interested the watchers aboard the "Panther."

Out of the white gloom ahead, some hundreds of yards, and almost bow-on from the "Panther," came the long-drawn-out hail:

"He-e-elp!"

"What's that?" demanded Joseph Baldwin, starting.

"He-elp!" came the appeal once more.

"Sounds like the latest trick from our friends on the 'Victor,'" grinned Captain Tom Halstead.

Ab Perkins, with the megaphone in his hand, had pushed his way up to the very peak of the bow.

"Ahoy!" he bawled, lustily, through the voice-carrier. "Who's in need of help?"

Back came the answer, faint, yet distinct:

"A castaway in a dory! For heaven's sake, pick me up!"

"Not a thing happened after we picked up

the last castaway in a small boat," uttered Joseph Baldwin, sarcastically.

"That hail sounded like a boy's voice," muttered Tom.

"If you pick *anyone* up in this fog, be careful!" cautioned the owner.

"Oh, won't I be careful, though?" retorted Skipper Tom. "Yet I've half a mind to pick this chap up, just to see what the game is. My curiosity is working over-time. I'm anxious to see the newest trick from the hands that steer the 'Victor'!"

CHAPTER XIX

TED DYER, SAILOR BY MARRIAGE

STILL Ab continued to hail from the bow of the motor yacht, young Captain Tom having gone forward to stand by him and give directions.

"We'll take you aboard, and have a look at you, anyway," Ab called through the megaphone. "That is, if you make us closely enough to catch a rope from us. But we won't change our course, or stop ship."

"Sa-ay, that's hardly fair!" came the indignant protest.

"If you want to get aboard this craft, do as we tell you," Ab Perkins retorted, doughtily.

"A-all right! I can't stay out on the ocean alone any longer, anyway!" came back the answer, with a new note of determination in it.

"Then stop talking," directed Ab, "and get down to your oars, so as to run just alongside of us. And stand by to catch the line that'll be thrown to you."

"Aye, aye, sir!"

Catching up a coil of line, Perkins ran down nearer the waist of the ship. A seaman stood by with the ship's end of a rope boarding-ladder made fast. Captain Tom remained up in the "Panther's" bow.

Then, out of the fog, shot a dory into sight. In it sat a boy of about sixteen, wearing only a ragged shirt and hardly less ragged trousers. He bent at a pair of oars, his glance cast backward over one shoulder as he guided the craft so as to pass the "Panther" without being engulfed by her.

It was close work, and required rather fine seamanship on the part of the boy in the boat.

Had the "Panther" been going at anything like her full speed the effort to lay alongside would have ended in disaster. Even as it was, Captain Tom Halstead watched with not a little anxiety.

"Ready—catch the line!" sang Ab Perkins. The young executive officer of the "Panther" possessed fine judgment and a straight eye for such work. As the coil left Ab's hand it went whirling, uncoiling, through the air. The line landed fairly across the shoulder of the other boy below. He caught the rope, then sank down to the middle seat of the dory, bracing himself and holding on hard.

As the line became taut the bow of the dory was yanked about. The little craft heeled a bit, then righted, bumping in against the larger hull, then gliding off and riding rather easy.

The seaman at Ab's side now dropped the rope boarding-ladder overboard so that its lower end rested fairly in the dory.

"Swing onto the ladder, and kick the dory loose," directed Ab Perkins, steadily. "I reckon you can do it."

"Don't you want to recover the dory, to pay for my passage to land?" inquired the boy below.

"Not a bit of it," uttered Ab. "Too much truck aboard now."

"Then here comes—not much of anything," laughed the boy, in a clear, cool voice, as he seized the rope ladder, and sprang up onto it. As he left the dory that little craft drifted astern, soon to be lost to sight in the great fog.

In another moment the boy was aboard. No stranger was he to the sea. That much could be told by the neat, seaman-like way in which he came up the rope boarding-ladder.

"I've come on board, sir," laughed the stranger, touching the make-shift for a cap which he wore.

"So I see," nodded Tom Halstead, coming aft from the bow. "What's your name?"

"Ted Dyer."

"Hailing port?"

"'Frisco."

"Sailor, by trade?"

"No," laughed Ted, his eyes twinkling; "a sailor by marriage."

"What's that?" demanded Halstead, almost sharply. He almost suspected that the other boy was making game of him. If Dyer came from the "Victor," such levity was misplaced.

"My mother's sister married a captain of a freight schooner," Ted explained, more soberly.

"Oh. So you, so to speak, ran away to sea with your uncle?"

"No; he ran away from me *at sea*," answered young Dyer, more soberly.

"How long has your uncle been captain of the 'Victor'?" Halstead demanded, swiftly, hoping to catch this other boy off his guard.

"The 'Victor'?" repeated Ted, opening his

eyes wide. If he was shamming, then it was a fine bit of acting.

"Didn't you come from the steam yacht 'Victor'?" demanded Captain Tom, looking hard at the boy.

"Never heard of the craft before," declared Ted. Then: "Hold on, though. I'm lying without meaning to, it would seem. Yes; I know the 'Victor.' She's a hundred and twenty-two foot steam yacht, fine and fast."

"That's the 'Victor' just over to port," went on Tom, still eyeing the other youth, closely.

"Is it?" asked Ted Dyer. "Then your eyesight is sharper than mine."

"Don't try to get funny," warned Halstead.

"I don't want to," protested Ted. "You all strike me as first-rate fellows. And, anyway, you've fished me up out of the vasty deep, so to speak. Where's your captain?"

"You're looking at him," replied Halstead.

"Again," laughed Ted, "you're crediting me with finer eyesight than I possess."

"I am the captain," Tom replied, struggling against an inclination to like this boy. Ted was so brimming over with good humor, that it seemed almost wicked to suspect him of anything worse than being hungry.

"You're the captain?" demanded Ted, taken aback, and staring hard. Then, as he took in

the details of Halstead's uniform, and noted the looks on the faces of the others about him, he became convinced.

"Captain——" began Ted.

"Halstead," supplied Tom.

"Captain Halstead, as I'll have to dead-beat my passage back to San Francisco, I shall be mighty glad if you'll assign me to some work to do."

"On your word of honor you didn't come off the 'Victor'?" insisted the young skipper, still looking hard at the new arrival on board.

"On my honor I didn't. Why? Is it a crime to come on board from the 'Victor'?"

"Very nearly," Halstead replied, dryly. "We've got one fellow in the brig on board, charged with that very offense."

"Whew!" muttered Ted, looking grave. "Then what's the sentence for coming on board from a dory?"

"How did you come to be in that dory?" pressed the young skipper of the "Panther."

"You might call it mainly my uncle's offense," replied Ted Dyer, more gravely. "You see, my parents are dead. They left me a little money, and put me under the guardianship of my uncle. He put the money into the freight schooner, 'Nancy.' However, even at that, some of the earnings of the schooner had to be

put aside as belonging to my estate. So my uncle, being a bright man, conceived the idea, night before last, of putting me adrift in the dory you fished me out of. At the time he had only a drunken sailor named Griggs on deck with him. Griggs is a fellow my uncle, Captain Dalton, by name, can depend on. Uncle got me to go into the dory that was towing astern. Made believe he wanted me to see if anything had fouled the rudder. Then he cut the line and left me adrift. I guess he figured that there was a storm coming; that I'd never be heard from again, and that he'd get the schooner all for himself."

"The infernal scoundrel!" breathed Halstead, indignantly. Then, remembering his first suspicions, he shot in, closely:

"So your uncle isn't captain of the 'Victor'?"

"What's the joke?" demanded Ted, gazing at those about him, a look of wonder in his innocent blue eyes.

Tom Halstead was beginning to soften. Despite the grave need of caution and suspicion, Ted's honest good nature was infectious. Besides, as both the yachts were going at eight miles an hour, and the "Victor" was traveling only abeam, anyway, how could a boy in a dory put off from the steam yacht be so far

ahead of the position of either boat as to come down upon the "Panther" in the fashion Ted had done? Altogether, Captain Tom felt that he might do well to drop some of his suspicions. That same idea was occurring to some of the others who listened. It was Joe Dawson, however, who first gave voice to this new idea.

"I reckon Ted is all right, Captain," spoke up the young chief engineer. "At any rate, I feel willing to go bail for his good behavior on this craft."

"I guess this youngster is all right, Captain," spoke Joseph Baldwin, next stepping forward. "I'll take a chance with him, if you're willing."

Ted Dyer, meanwhile, was looking from one face to another, as though he wondered what kind of a crowd he had encountered.

"You may think us a bit strange, Dyer," spoke Tom, with a quiet smile. "The truth is, we have the best of reasons for being suspicious of the other yacht you've heard us talking about. You can stay aboard, and we'll try to make you comfortable."

"I haven't anything else to do, sir," said Joe, turning once more to the young captain. "I'll take Dyer in hand if you say so."

"Go ahead," assented Halstead. "First of all, take him below, Mr. Dawson, and intro-

duce him to the cook. I imagine that will be agreeable."

"You're good at guessing, Captain," laughed the San Francisco boy, saluting.

"Come along then, Ted Dyer," proposed Joe, taking him by the arm with a friendly grip. "You can come below to my cabin and chat while you eat."

"I guess I can do a lot of both," admitted the San Francisco boy, going along with Joe after making a bow that was intended to include everyone.

Joe, however, did not at first press the other boy to talk much, but was delighted at seeing Dyer able to stow away so much satisfying food.

"Now," demanded the newcomer, pushing his chair back from the table, "what am I going to do aboard this craft to earn my way?"

"What do you know best how to do?" asked Dawson.

"You said you are the chief engineer?"

"Yes."

"If there's anything I'm crazy about," confessed Ted Dyer, "it's machinery. Why couldn't I go to work in your engine room?"

"That's a rather unfortunate question," returned Joe, feeling a bit uncomfortable. "You see, the fellow who really *did* come aboard

from the 'Victor' got into the engine room and tried to put our machinery into a useless condition. So you can understand why Captain Halstead would stare if I told him I had put you in the engine room."

"What's all this business about the 'Victor,' anyway?" demanded Ted Dyer, curiously.

So Joe told him enough to enable the other boy to understand, including the fact that a United States assistant district attorney and two deputy marshals were aboard intent upon arresting a bank absconder believed to be on board the "Victor."

"And that boat is trying to lose you in the fog, so that Mr. Absconder can get away?" asked Ted Dyer, understandingly.

"That's the case, Dyer."

"Then I can understand why it wouldn't look well for me to ask for a job in the engine room," pondered Ted, thoughtfully. "I suppose, though, I could go in and help the cook. I couldn't do any harm there. Yes, I could, though; I might poison the dishes or the food."

Joe Dawson gave a hearty laugh, so completely was he disarmed of suspicion of the other boy.

"I guess perhaps we'd better leave it all to Captain Halstead," proposed Joe Dawson. "He's a fine, splendid fellow, as you'll find."

"Fine and suspicious," retorted Ted, with a grimace.

"He has to be, on a strange cruise like this. But you'll find Captain Tom Halstead as good as fine gold, Ted. Halstead is my chum."

"If he's your chum," vouchsafed Dyer, heartily, "then I'll take my oath he's all right."

"Come up on deck," nodded Joe, moving toward the companion way.

CHAPTER XX

THE FIND IN THE FOREHOLD

TED DYER'S place was quickly determined upon.

Bickson, the chief quartermaster, who attended to the general "policing" of the yacht—that is, the cleaning up and the sanitary care of the boat, had one seaman assigned to help him. Ted was added as an extra hand in this line, being placed at once under the orders of the quartermaster who was acting in Bickson's place while the latter was out in the launch.

"It looks, now, as though Dyer is all right, from the ground up, quartermaster," Captain Tom said, in a low voice. "At the same time,

of course, you'll keep a general eye on the youngster?"

"I certainly will, Captain."

"Above all, don't let him get anywhere near the prisoner in the brig. Don't permit any possibility of communication between Dyer and Cragthorpe."

"I understand, Captain."

Before he had been at work for an hour Ted Dyer was earning golden good opinions from the acting chief quartermaster. Not the slightest curiosity did the new member of the crew display about anything that didn't concern him. As a worker Ted Dyer was number one.

About three o'clock the evidence of a new game on the part of the enemy came to notice. The steam launch of the "Victor" ceased sounding her whistle off at the starboard of the "Panther." Tom Halstead, who was on deck, ready to note the slightest sign, became instantly suspicious.

"Mr. Davis," he called, "sound the agreed-on signal from our own fog-horn for Bickson to come in, post-haste with our power boat."

From the "Panther's" fog-horn sounded four short blasts.

Just a few minutes later Tom Halstead, listening at the rail, heard the "Victor's" machinery moving at faster rate.

"There they go, stealing away from us," muttered the young skipper.

"And not sounding their fog-horn any more, either," commented Joseph Baldwin.

"It won't take 'em long to get out of our hearing, if our tender doesn't get in," predicted Halstead.

"Confound Bickson! Where is he? What's he doing?" demanded the "Panther's" owner, impatiently.

Barely thirty seconds later, however, the "Panther's" power tender shot in alongside. The falls and tackle were lowered swiftly. The instant when the hoisting began Halstead called sharply:

"Mr. Davis, start us forward on the jump. Don't let those tricksters slip us in that fashion."

Second Officer Davis gave the order for increased speed. Then, before it could be carried out, he cried, excitedly:

"What has become of the 'Victor,' sir? Can you hear her machinery, now?"

Tom Halstead listened intently, growing paler. Barely forty-five seconds before he had had the enemy within sound. Now, not a single trace of noise came to him over the waters.

"By Jove! they've slipped us," he groaned, uneasily.

"That's what," confessed Dick, in a hushed, scared voice.

Joseph Baldwin's face was a study in intense anxiety.

"I'm afraid the steam yacht has gotten away from us, Captain," he remarked. "If that really has happened, I don't blame you. The chances, in a game of this sort, and under these conditions, are all with the fugitive."

"Perhaps it isn't a matter of blame," muttered Skipper Tom, his face chalk-white, his hands nervously gripping at the port deck rail. "But I'm chagrined—ashamed, just the same. What have those rascals done? Have they stopped speed altogether? Are they drifting, so that, if we go ahead, we are drawing further away from them all the time? Or did they shoot well ahead of us, then succeed in running with almost no noise, and on a new course, so that they are slipping further away from us every minute? Shall we stop and drift? Or, if we go ahead, what speed and which course shall we take? Confound the wretches!"

"It is a big problem," admitted Joseph Baldwin, his own face as white as that of the young skipper.

"Have you any orders, sir?" asked Halstead, quickly.

"No," replied Joseph Baldwin, slowly. "All

I can do is to guess. That's all you can do, either, Captain Halstead; but your guess is just as likely to be the right one as is my own."

The "Panther" was now traveling at a speed of twelve miles, sounding her fog-horn twice in the minute.

"The worst of it is that our horn betrays us to the enemy," muttered Tom. "They have no respect for the laws of the sea, so that we give them guide, while they give us nothing in return."

"We won't quite give up hope," uttered Mr. Baldwin, dispiritedly. "At the same time, I fancy we're now as good as whipped. I don't see any chance for us."

"The only chance that's left," replied Skipper Tom, "is the chance of luck. Until you give other orders, sir, I shall keep to the same course, and at the same speed."

Baldwin nodded, turning away. Somehow, the depressing news had passed around. The cabin passengers came pouring out on deck, asking well-nigh innumerable questions of the young captain and of the sadly perplexed owner.

"All I can say," replied Mr. Baldwin to his questioners, "is that we must depend upon the slender chance of—luck."

"And all I can say," added Captain Tom Halstead, "is—wait!"

Gaston Giddings, who, in the morning, had been so insistent on having Cragthorpe set at liberty, now underwent a complete change of feeling in the matter.

"That wretch in the brig could tell us something about this latest trick," declared the young bank president, quivering with wrath. "Mr. Baldwin, why don't you have the fellow brought on deck and made to confess whatever he may know about the plans of the Rollings crowd on the 'Victor'?"

"Even if Cragthorpe should know all about the enemy's plans," demanded the owner, "how could I make him confess if he didn't want to?"

"Torture him, if you have to, until he talks freely," snarled Gaston Giddings.

"That wouldn't do," negatived Baldwin. "This is the twentieth century, and we live under laws. We can't put men to the torture nowadays."

"Then let me go down and see Cragthorpe," cried Giddings, nervously. "I'll find a way to make him talk! Give me the key to the brig."

To this proposition Captain Halstead returned a most emphatic refusal.

"Whoop!" sounded a jubilant voice from below. "Whoo-oo-oopee!"

"Who on earth is that?" demanded Mr. Ross.

"Ted Dyer, the last castaway we picked up out of the ocean," responded Captain Halstead.

"What on earth can he find to be so joyous——"

"Whoo-oo!" interrupted Ted himself, appearing on deck at that instant. His eyes were snapping with excitement, his face fairly glowing with delight.

"Say, do you know what's down in the forehold, sir?" he demanded, facing Captain Tom Halstead.

"No; and how do you?" broke in Joseph Baldwin, interrupting.

"Quartermaster Bickson set me to tidying up there," explained Ted. Then, turning to the young skipper, the San Francisco boy rattled on:

"There's a case there, under a lot of other stuff, marked 'shotguns,' and another case marked 'rifles.' Then there are other boxes labeled 'ammunition.' "

"Great Scott! I had forgotten that stuff—didn't know it was on board, in fact," exclaimed the owner.

"I heard you tell," Ted hastened on, speaking to Tom Halstead, "how you were handicapped, when right alongside the 'Victor,' by not having any firearms except the two revolvers of the

deputy marshals. But, now! You've got an arsenal if those boxes are labeled straight."

"I believe the boxes are labeled all right," replied Joseph Baldwin, smiling sadly. "Yet, now that we know we have weapons enough at hand we haven't any steam yacht to board!"

CHAPTER XXI

ON A BLIND TRAIL OF THE SEA

"**T**HOSE guns were put aboard six months ago, when I was planning to run the 'Panther' down to Guatemala on a jaguar-hunting trip," explained Mr. Baldwin. "Afterwards, when the trip was abandoned, the guns were taken ashore. I'll admit I didn't know the arms were now on board."

"We may catch up with those rascals again, sir," suggested Ted Dyer, hopefully.

"I wish I had your enthusiasm, and your belief in the future, young man," remarked Mr. Baldwin, with a shake of his head.

"Anyway, since the weapons have been found," interjected Halstead, "they may as well be taken out of their cases and cleaned, and the ammunition sorted over. We should have such things where we can get at them in a moment, at need."

"Right enough," nodded the owner.

"I'll go down and have a look at the things," proposed the young skipper. "Lead the way, Dyer."

Ted went below, jubilantly enough, pointing out the cases, which he had dragged out from under other supplies. Then Dyer went to the engine room for hammer, cold chisel and screw-driver, after which the cases were opened.

"Ten splendid repeating rifles, the same number of dandy shot-guns, and ammunition enough to keep these guns firing for a week," muttered Halstead when half an hour's work had resulted in displaying all the contents of the cases. "Oh, if we had only had these the other night, or at any time when we were out of the great fog and in sight of the 'Victor'!"

Regrets were, however, utterly useless.

All of the weapons were taken on deck. Some were stacked in the wheel house, others in Tom's cabin and some in the owner's suite. Boxes of cartridges and shells were also placed with the guns.

"I shall hate these things every time I see them," muttered Joseph Baldwin. "I should have remembered, and have had a search made. But it's no use fussing now."

"Oh, if we only could meet up with those fellows, now!" sighed Tom.

"Humph! If hens would only lay eggs of solid gold," snorted Mr. Baldwin, "there'd be no sense in a bank cashier running away with the stuffing of the bank's vault! Captain Halstead, we won't pick that steam yacht up again in this fog."

"Then, sir, we may do it when the fog lifts," predicted Halstead, hopefully.

Baldwin shook his head.

"All we can do, young man, is to keep on in a general course toward San Francisco, as we're doing. This fog will probably hang to us all the way to our anchorage off Market Street. If the fog should lift before that, there isn't one chance in a thousand that we'll find the 'Victor' in sight."

"I'm on this cruise, sir," rejoined the young captain, "with the notion that the cruise can't end until we've run alongside the 'Victor' somewhere. It may be that we'll sight some other vessel that has seen the steam yacht. In that way we may get the news that will send us hustling down the coast to Mexico, or across the ocean to Japan."

Joseph Baldwin grinned wistfully.

"Well, one thing, Captain; we have enough gasoline to go 'most anywhere. My friends thought I was almost crazy to have such big tanks put aboard to hold gasoline. But I replied that,

when we didn't need the extra oil, it would serve as ballast. If we have to burn that oil we can fill the tanks with salt water and still keep ballasted."

"In any clear weather we can use the sails a good deal, and save oil at that, sir," suggested the young skipper.

However, they continued on through the fog the rest of that afternoon, and through the night, without discovering a sign of any other craft. The loneliness of that great ocean about them began to get somewhat on the nerves of some of the passengers. Gaston Giddings, suffering infernal tortures for want of the drug to which he had become such a pitiful slave, kept to the cabin.

Through the long night the "Panther" kept plodding on her way, rolling a good deal in the sea. Tom spent much of his time on the bridge with the watch officer. So morning came around again, and it was Third Mate Costigan's deck watch.

Tom, who had been below in his cabin for the last three hours, came on deck again at about nine in the morning. Somehow, he could not sleep. The sense of failure preyed upon his nerves.

For some minutes Captain Tom stood at the bridge rail, one hand at his ear. He was trying

to catch even the faintest sound of another fog-horn than the "Panther's."

At last he started.

"Did you hear that, Mr. Costigan?" he demanded.

"I heard nothing, sir."

"Then keep perfectly quiet, and listen hard."

Within two minutes both officers were sure they heard a fog-horn.

"But it's the fog-horn of a sailing vessel," muttered Tom, disappointedly.

"Coming this way, too, sir," replied Mr. Costigan.

"The people on the 'Victor' wouldn't hesitate to use a sailing vessel's signals in order to fool us," muttered Halstead.

"Shall I pass well to starboard of the sailing craft, sir?" asked the third officer.

"No; get in her path. When we're near enough, signal that we want to speak the other vessel," Halstead answered.

Within seven or eight minutes the "Panther" was signaling the other craft by sound for the desired marine interview. The "all right" signal came back. Then the two vessels were cautiously manœuvred to meet each other without collision.

At last a big bowsprit loomed up out of the white gloom, close at hand.

"Put your helm hard-a-starboard!" roared Mr. Costigan through the wheel house speaking-tube. Then, after some further manœuvring, during which the "Panther's" propellers reversed, the two craft lay hazily in sight of each other.

The stranger proved to be a long, low, white schooner yacht hailing from San Diego as the home port, but now bound for Hawaii.

"Do you know the steam yacht 'Victor' when you see her?" Tom shouted over the "Panther's" rail.

"Yes," came back the testy answer. "And sometimes we see too much of her. We did this morning."

"You did?" Halstead demanded, excitedly. "Where?"

"Back on our course. She came along through the fog like a thief, without signaling. If my first mate hadn't been in the bow at the moment, and able to pass the order back like lightning, that infernal steam yacht would have sunk us."

"How far away do you think the 'Victor' is now?" Tom demanded.

"At a good guess, say twelve miles ahead of you, on a pretty straight course for the Golden Gate."

"Thank you, Captain!"

"You're welcome."

As the schooner yacht's sails filled, and she bore away on her course, a dozen people on the "Panther's" deck let up a wild cheer.

"Fog or no fog, we'll catch up with the 'Victor' if we have luck," declared Captain Tom Halstead. Then his face took on a troubled look.

"I forgot," he muttered. "The captain of the 'Victor' will hear our fog horn, and—oh, confound a fog-horn on a chase like this!"

"Perhaps this is where a lawyer can help you out," smiled Mr. Jephson. "You're now a dozen miles behind the 'Victor.' Well, Captain, if you tone down your fog-horn so that it can't be heard for more than half or three quarters of a mile, it will still make noise enough to warn any innocent craft out of your path. Can't you tone down the horn?"

"Yes," answered Tom, rather dubiously, "if it will be strictly straightforward and legal."

"As a representative of the United States courts, I'll take all the responsibility," Mr. Jephson pledged himself. "I know," he added, "that I haven't, really, a legal right to authorize you to go forward without signals. That right belongs to the Navy, and to revenue cutter commanders. But I'll take the responsibility upon myself, Captain Halstead. All innocent vessels proceed under regular signals, anyway, and that does away with the risk of collision."

The young motor boat captain needed no further urging. He called Joe on deck. Together the two chums worked over the fog-horn until the hail it sent forth would not carry more than a half mile.

In the meantime, Third Officer Costigan, on the bridge, had been making use of his arithmetic. Figuring that the "Victor" was twelve miles ahead of the "Panther" and still following the same course at the same speed, the third mate had to calculate the time that would elapse before the motor yacht would be just two miles astern of its quarry.

At the same time Ab Perkins was briefly busy, at least. It fell to his share to see that the power tender was all in trim for lowering over the side. Provisions and water, a compass and a fog-horn had to be added to the usual equipment of the boat. Firearms were stocked aboard, as well, and a greater supply of lines than the tender usually carried.

Meanwhile, of course, the "Panther" was traveling at increased speed, this speed being carefully regulated to fit in with the problems that Third Officer Costigan was so carefully solving.

For the next two hours Captain Tom Halstead strolled nervously about. Mr. Jephson, Mr. Baldwin, Mr. Ross and a few others were

observed to be similarly afflicted with restlessness.

Just before noon Tom Halstead climbed the stairs to the bridge, consulting Mr. Costigan's figures carefully.

"Slow down the speed," Halstead ordered, after a few moments of listening that brought to them no sound showing another vessel to be near. "Mr. Perkins, stand by and lower the tender."

As the "Panther" slowed up there was a rush to the port rail, for the tender was to carry a goodly crew. When the little power boat lay in the water alongside, Captain Tom Halstead was the first to go over the side. He was followed by Jed Prentiss, who was to act as engineer officer of this expedition. Then came Mr. Jephson and his two deputy marshals. Next followed Joe Dawson, who did *not* go in the capacity of engineer. Messrs. Baldwin and Ross next followed, then two of the "Panther's" seamen, and, last of all, Ted Dyer. Quartermaster Bickson had been in the power boat when it was lowered, thus making twelve altogether in the party.

"Cast off," called Tom, sharply, while Joe, already at the steering seat, threw the wheel over to port. "Mr. Perkins, you're in command of the yacht."

"Any signals to arrange with us, Captain?" called the young first mate.

"No! I don't believe you'll see us again in a hurry," Tom replied, as the power launch darted away, "unless we come back on board the 'Victor!' "

From the yacht's rail came a subdued cheer. Halstead waved his hand to his first mate.

A few bucketfuls of water slopped over into the tender. The sea was running high for such a small craft. Those in the launch, however, thought of nothing but the goal ahead.

CHAPTER XXII

A STERN LOOMS UP IN THE FOG

JOE DAWSON, at the wheel of the power tender, bent grimly over the compass.

There was little need for him to look about him, anyway, since it was not possible to see anything distinctly at a greater distance than three boat-lengths away.

Almost immediately the "Panther" dropped back out of view. The big motor yacht was now to go along only at her slow cruising speed, but the launch was to make greater haste.

Tom Halstead had taken his post well up in the bow of the rolling little craft. He was list-

ening intently for any betraying sounds ahead in their course.

"This is hardly a big enough boat for a sea like this," grumbled Mr. Jephson, who had taken up his post close to the young captain.

"The sea is a good deal on the roll to-day," Halstead assented, briefly.

"Why, this little craft acts as though she'd turn over and dump us all in the ocean," muttered the assistant district attorney, uneasily.

"The crowd we have aboard makes her sit lower than usual in the water," Tom explained.

"Is there any *real* danger of our tipping over, Captain?" insisted Mr. Jephson.

"Why, it might happen, of course, sir."

"Do you think it is *going* to happen?" demanded Mr. Jephson, anxiously.

There are many men, brave enough elsewhere, who are cowards on a heavy sea with only a small boat between themselves and the water. Back on the "Panther" the district attorney's representative had felt no sense of danger.

"Why, I don't know whether the boat is going to heel over, or not," Tom replied. "You are right in supposing that it isn't quite a large enough craft for the job in hand, but it was the only thing we had."

"I can't swim, but I'll try to keep my nerve," grimaced Mr. Jephson.

Whatever the others thought of their chances of being pitched into the ocean, none of them said anything.

Halstead looked back, presently, to inquire:

“Mr. Prentiss, can’t you deaden the noise of our exhaust still more?”

“I’m trying to,” replied the young assistant engineer. “Think I’m going to succeed, too.”

After a few moments the tender ran along all but noiselessly. Though the exhaust still gave forth some little sound, it was wholly likely that this reduced noise would not be heard above the machinery running on the “Victor” if the expedition in the tender should be so fortunate as to catch up with the steam yacht.

The twelve men sat huddled there in the cramped space, trying to blind their minds to the danger of capsizing in the rolling sea. For more than half an hour the tender ran ahead at nearly its best speed, ere Tom Halstead called back:

“Joe, take my signals. I think we’re getting in closer—to something!”

Eagerly all bent forward to listen. After a minute or two more it seemed to them that they really could hear, faintly, the rather distant sound of the moving machinery of some steam craft. Yet this noise, none too distinct, was muffled still more by the ceaseless wash of the

rolling sea, whose waves broke in white crests everywhere about them.

Halstead, whose ears were perhaps the keenest on board, listened and occasionally signaled for the launch to be veered a little either to port or starboard.

Surely, they were creeping up on something that ran by machinery, though through the curtain of white no eye could make out the form of a vessel.

Somewhere, away to starboard, a great, deep note boomed out.

"That's some big vessel, like a liner," Tom whispered to Jephson. Then, from away off to port sounded the tolling bell of a sailing vessel. Both appeared to be headed toward the "Panther's" launch.

"They seem to be about half a mile apart," Halstead whispered. "The 'Victor,' I think, will pass between the two craft. While that deep whistle and solemn bell are going the people on the steam yacht are not so likely to hear us. Pass the word to Mr. Prentiss to increase speed a little, if he can do so without making more noise at the exhaust."

A little faster spurted the power tender, and a little worse became the tossing in that rolling sea. All the members of the party were in drenched clothing by this time. The water came

aboard faster under this burst of speed; the two seamen began to bail it out.

"If I ever get out of this boat alive, large yachts will be small enough for me in the future," Mr. Jephson told himself, nervously.

Tom Halstead was paying no heed to the incoming water. That was Joe's affair, since Joe Dawson was handling the craft.

"Pass the word to Jed to watch for signals from me," whispered Tom Halstead, tensely, a few minutes later.

"Then you think——" began the district attorney's assistant eagerly.

"Pass the word for me, please," Tom broke in.

In the gray fog ahead some craft was moving by steam power. Those in the launch could now hear the regular thump-thump, soft though it was, of machinery ahead.

Yet, to most of the silent watchers it came as something of a shock when, out of the mist ahead, there suddenly loomed, indistinctly, the stern of a hull.

Away to starboard sounded the deep whistle of the big steamship, while over to port the bell of that sailing vessel tolled. The noise enabled Halstead to creep in more closely with less dread of being discovered too soon.

A moment's breathlessness, then "Victor—San Francisco" stood out boldly before the eyes

of the people in the launch as that boat shot in by the yacht's stern.

They were taking grave chances, now, of being swamped at the very door of success. None knew this better than Tom Halstead and Joe Dawson as they jointly manœuvred to run the tender up stealthily, while Jed Prentiss, trembling inwardly, kept his hand on the lever, ready to obey the slightest signal for speed.

Then, swiftly, Tom Halstead, a rifle strapped over his back, rose in the bow. In one hand he held a line to the other end of which was attached a grappling hook.

With a practiced eye and hand he measured the distance, poising the coil for a throw. Just as the tender stole in closer he made the throw.

All hands watched breathlessly for a second or two. Then, as straight and true as a well-aimed bullet, the grappling hook fell and caught at the "Victor's" stern rail.

Not an instant did the young motor boat skipper lose. There was no time to inquire whether someone else wanted to go first. Tom Halstead seized the tautening line with both hands, and began to climb as only a sailor *can* go up a rope.

His head quickly appeared above the steam yacht's stern rail. Tom Halstead slipped onto the deck just in time to see two men walking slowly aft. One of them was in uniform—per-

haps he was the captain of the steam yacht. But the other, in civilian dress, the young motor yacht captain knew instantly from the description of him which he had heard.

"Frank Rollings, the absconding cashier!" flashed through Tom's mind.

CHAPTER XXIII

ROLLINGS'S LAST RUSE

BOTH approaching men were regarding the deck, talking in earnest tones as they came astern.

"If we should pass out of this fog," Rollings was saying, "and if the 'Panther' should prove to be close to us——"

Just at this point the speaker stopped. He panted, then staggered back, clutching at his uniformed companion.

In almost the same instant both caught sight of lone Tom Halstead.

Though not quite alone, either, for Tom had succeeded in unlimbering his rifle, and both strangers now found themselves staring down into the muzzle.

"Don't stir, please!" mocked Tom Halstead, coolly.

"How in the world *did* he get on board?"

faltered Rollings, hoarsely, his face ashen with terror.

The uniformed man with him saw the grappling hook resting over the stern rail, and did not need to ask.

At this instant Tom Halstead felt himself being pushed from behind, and took a step forward. Then Ted Dyer bounded onto deck beside him, bringing another rifle into play.

"They're boarding us!" gasped Rollings, in the voice of a man who felt himself dying from fright.

The uniformed man with him did not move; neither did he show any signs of fear, though he was facing the business ends of two rifles.

Joe Dawson was on deck, now. Joe turned long enough to toss down a light line. It came up again, carrying the hooks of a boarding-ladder. Joe dropped this into place, then, with a quiet grin, turned to inspect the scene on deck.

Suddenly the man in uniform turned and ran, defying possible shots.

"Turn out the whole crew!" he bawled. "A posse is coming on board. Stand by to fight!"

"Shall I drop the fellow?" quivered Ted.

"No," came Halstead's quick answer. Then, as Frank Rollings summoned the strength to wheel about as if to bolt, Halstead shouted, warningly:

“Rollings, if you try to move, you won’t get three steps away!”

At this instant one of the United States deputy marshals came up over the rail.

“Officer,” called Tom, “there’s the man you’ve cruised so far to arrest.”

Though he had a rifle strapped over his back, the marshal drew his revolver as he ran forward.

“Frank Rollings, you’re a United States prisoner. Put up your hands!”

With a moan that was half a scream, Rollings, instead, sank to the deck in a huddled heap.

“A man with no more nerve than you have should not try to loot a bank,” growled the officer, as he snapped handcuffs onto the wrists of the seemingly palsied wretch.

The other deputy was on board, by now, and other members of the boarding party were coming up fast. Mr. Jephson was among the foremost of them.

“Come forward to the bridge,” he called, now taking charge. “We’ll take command of this whole craft. Deputy, make it your whole business to prevent your prisoner from getting away. Hold on to him, but come forward with us.”

The same uniformed, bearded man appeared suddenly around the pilot house as the party swept forward along the port side of the yacht.



Rollings Sank to the Deck in a Huddled Heap.

Rollings, his knees doubling under him, had to be dragged.

The uniformed man suddenly raised a rifle, shouting:

“Stand by, men! We’ll put a stop to this nonsense!”

“Drop that gun, or we’ll open fire on you!” shouted Mr. Jephson, sternly.

The boarding party moved swiftly forward. Behind the captain stood a mate and four or five seamen, all looking irresolute. Of a sudden the mate wheeled, throwing a rifle over the rail at starboard. The seamen with him instantly followed his example.

Even the bearded captain had lowered the muzzle of his rifle. It is easier to be brave on the side of the law than against it.

“Put that captain in irons,” Mr. Jephson ordered the marshal who had no prisoner to cumber him.

Sullenly, the captain of the “Victor” submitted to being handcuffed.

“All of the rest of the officers and crew muster up in the bow,” called Mr. Jephson. “Captain Halstead, I call upon you to take command of this yacht for the present. The quartermaster of this craft may remain in the wheel house if he’ll take orders straight.”

“Aye, aye, sir,” the quartermaster called,

briefly, through one of the lowered windows of the pilot house.

Tom Halstead, still carrying his rifle and holding it ready, ran up to the bridge.

Stepping over to the signaling apparatus, Halstead rang for speed enough to furnish bare headway.

"Quartermaster," the new commander of the "Victor" called down through the wheel house speaking-tube, "you'll keep to the same course you've been following, and sound the fog whistle every thirty seconds."

"Captain," called Mr. Baldwin, a few moments later, "can you put one of your party up there on the bridge? We have yet other duties to perform here."

"Take the bridge, Mr. Prentiss," called Tom, for he understood instantly what other work was likely to be on hand, and he knew that Joe Dawson would want a hand in it.

Aft of the captain's quarters there was a main deck house. Into this cabin Rollings and the captain of the steam yacht were taken. Mr. Jephson was now talking to the two prisoners as solemnly as though holding actual court.

"Do you think the 'Panther' will overtake us here, out on the high seas, Captain?" questioned Mr. Baldwin, just as they entered this

cabin. "That is, will he recognize the 'Victor's' fog-whistle?"

"He'll make a good guess at it, I think," laughed Halstead. "I've just directed Mr. Prentiss, in ten minutes more, to begin sounding whole bunches of blasts in quick succession. Ab will be clever enough to guess that it is our crowd celebrating a capture."

"Now, then, Rollings," declared Mr. Jephson, sternly, "it is time for you to tell us where the money stolen from the Sheepmen's Bank is hidden aboard this craft?"

"You won't find five hundred dollars on board," replied the cashier, with a ghastly smile.

"My man, it may save you some years on the sentence that is coming to you if you tell us promptly where to find the stolen money," warned the United States assistant district attorney, sternly.

"I've said all I'm going to say," returned Rollings, sullenly.

"Captain Blake," asked Jephson, turning toward the bearded one, "you also have much to answer for in the courts. Do you desire to win any leniency by telling us, now, what you can?"

"All I've anything to do with here," retorted Captain Blake, "is the running of this

yacht. That work you've taken from me. So I've nothing to do, and nothing to say."

Mr. Jephson, however, continued to question first one prisoner, then the other, though in vain, until Mr. Baldwin broke in:

"Jephson, you can't make these fellows talk. They're afraid they'd only run their necks further into the noose of the law. Besides, this rascal, Rollings, hopes that, if you can't find the money, he'll win complete pardon in the matter by restoring most of it later on. It'll save a good deal of time, I imagine, if you place both these fellows under close guard by one of your deputies, then lead us in a search through this craft."

By this time Jed Prentiss, following orders, had begun to turn loose on the fog-horn, sounding it so rapidly that Ab Perkins, somewhere behind in the mist with the "Panther," must be able to guess what had happened.

One of the deputies now guarded Rollings and Captain Blake, while the other had gone below to the engine room. There the engineer's crew had agreed to serve faithfully under the new command, but the deputy was there to see to it that they didn't change their minds. Quartermaster Bickson and one of his seamen had driven the crew of the "Victor" to the fore-castle, and mounted guard over them.

The searchers, comprising Mr. Jephson, Mr. Baldwin and the latter's captain, Halstead, were joined by Mr. Ross, Joe Dawson and Ted Dyer.

"There are enough of us here," laughed Mr. Baldwin, "to turn this craft inside out in another half hour."

First of all, Frank Rollings's own quarters were searched, as a matter of course. It had been learned, since coming aboard, that the absconding cashier was now the owner of the "Victor," having bought her secretly three days before his flight.

There was no safe in the owner's cabin. The desk stood wide-open, with hardly a scrap of paper in it. The mattress was yanked from the bed, ripped and thoroughly searched, but not a trace of the stolen money was found. The pillows were served in the same fashion, with no better results. Other nooks and corners of the cabin were explored, without success. Nor were any better results achieved in the captain's cabin.

Cabin, dining room and state-rooms below were explored. By this time the searchers had broken up into smaller parties. The more they searched the more dispirited did the hunters become.

"We're not going to find the missing money

with ease," announced Mr. Jephson, when he had rounded up all his searching force on deck.

"We've looked in about every possible place except the forecastle, the water butts and the coal bunkers," declared Jason Ross, disgustedly.

"The money isn't likely to be in any of those places," declared Mr. Jephson, shaking his head. "Hullo, what's that racket?"

Off in the fog a horn was sounding frantically.

Tom Halstead laughed.

"You ought to know that tune, Mr. Jephson. You've heard it days enough. That's the 'Panther' coming up with us, with Ab Perkins in command. He understood our signal, as I thought he would. He'll be hailing us within two minutes."

"But that won't be finding the money," broke in Joseph Baldwin, impatiently.

"Nor do I believe we're going to find it—not immediately, anyway," answered Mr. Jephson. "This boat doesn't seem to be full of hiding places, and I believe we have done all the searching we can do out here at sea. We shall have to run the 'Victor' in at anchorage at San Francisco, then put aboard a force of officers under experienced detectives, and leave the search to them."

"Confound it," growled Jason Ross, "I know, as well as I know I'm standing here, that there are three million dollars in actual cash somewhere within a hundred feet of us. It makes me almost frantic to think that we can't put our hands right on it."

"Ahoy, there!" roared a voice off in the fog.

Though the other craft was invisible, and though the voice came through a megaphone, the hearers knew it was Ab Perkins's voice. Jed snatched up a megaphone to shout back:

"Ahoy, 'Panther'!"

"Ahoy! Then you've found the 'Victor'?"

"Aye, and captured her."

"Did you find Rollings?"

"He's a prisoner, under close guard."

"And the money?"

"That's what we all want to know," Jed admitted, sadly.

"You can't find it?"

"Not even a dollar bill!"

There was a pause, during which those on board the steam yacht knew that their friends on the motor yacht were discussing this chilling news.

"What are Captain Halstead's orders?" shouted Ab, finally.

Jed bent over the bridge rail to talk with Captain Tom, then answered:

"Keep about abreast of us, and a quarter of a mile off. Proceed with us, straight for the Golden Gate. Keep your fog-horn sounding at intervals of one minute, or at such other intervals as you may hear us sounding. Three sharp blasts of the whistle will mean for you to stand by to find out what we're doing in the fog."

"Aye, aye," answered Ab Perkins. "Is that all?"

"That's all, Mr. Perkins."

The "Victor" now proceeded on her way to the home port at about eight miles an hour. Though no one on board could see the "Panther," the sound of the latter's fog-horn was always with them.

"The prisoner, Rollings, wants to see you, Mr. Jephson," called the deputy marshal from the deck-house cabin.

Jephson went back.

"Well, Rollings, have you come to your senses? Are you going to tell us where the missing money is?" demanded the assistant district attorney.

"I know nothing about any missing money," replied the bank cashier, doggedly. "See here, man, what I want to ask is: Do you intend to torture me needlessly?"

"No; what do you want?"

"Let me go to my own cabin, and let me

have these handcuffs off," pleaded the prisoner. "I need rest; I'm nearly a wreck."

"I can let you go to your cabin, and even remove the handcuffs," agreed Mr. Jephson. "But I'll have to place a guard in there with you."

"All right, then," sighed the prisoner.

He was taken to his own cabin, the handcuffs removed, and the cashier threw himself upon his bed, while the deputy marshal took a seat where he could watch his man.

Captain Blake begged a similar privilege, which was refused. He was made to go out on deck where he could be watched by all hands.

For half an hour Rollings lay on the bed, his eyes closed, as though asleep. Occasionally he twitched, or made some slight movement. That was all. The deputy seated opposite began to find the situation a dull one. At last the prisoner half sat up, to take off his shoes.

"My feet are burning," he complained, as he dropped the shoes at the foot of the bed, then sank back on the pillow.

"You're nervous; that's why your feet trouble you," observed the deputy, with a knowing smile.

Then Rollings began to breathe heavily; bye

and bye two or three snores escaped him. The deputy, finding it duller and duller, unintentionally allowed his eyes to close. Instantly the cashier's own eyes opened a trifle. At last, smiling cunningly, the cashier moved slightly, securing one of his shoes. He poised it, aimed and threw. The heel of the shoe struck the deputy on the head, causing him to drop forward out of the chair and lie apparently senseless on the floor.

Suppressing a cry of exultation, Frank Rollings leaped from the bed. There was now the light of mania in his eyes. This thief, disgraced, about to be despoiled, and presently to be sent to prison for a long term, preferred to die.

This he might have accomplished with the deputy's revolver, but that would not enable him to carry out all of his purpose. On one wall of the cabin stood a rack containing a water-bottle and two glasses.

Over to this rack stole the captured thief. He swung the rack to one side, then pressed a certain nail in the wood-work there. Instantly a door in the wall swung open.

Rollings's eyes eagerly peered into the recess thus laid bare. Then, with a nearly inarticulate cry of joy, he drew out a small though heavy-looking iron box.

“Neither me nor the money shall they have!” uttered the wretch, in insane joy.

With a last look at the still unconscious deputy, Frank Rollings threw his cabin door open.

As he sprang to the deck three or four watchers saw him.

“Look out! There’s the prisoner trying to escape!” shouted Joseph Baldwin.

There was not time for anyone to reach Rollings ere that crafty, unbalanced wretch, clutching desperately at the iron box, bounded to the rail, stood there tottering for an instant, and then leaped far out into the water.

It was Tom Halstead who first saw the iron box and comprehended the meaning of the scene.

“There he goes!” yelled Halstead. “And the box with the three millions in it will sink like a stone!”

CHAPTER XXIV

CONCLUSION

NEVER slow to act, Captain Tom darted aft, intent on leaping overboard also.

Ted Dyer, however, chanced to be standing close to the stern. Ted saw Rollings when the latter first leaped to the rail.

As quickly as it flashed upon Dyer what was happening, the San Francisco boy scrambled to the rail. Almost at the instant that Rollings jumped Ted's own feet left the rail. The two struck the water within thirty feet of each other.

Nothing but the slow speed of the steam yacht, perhaps, saved both from being dragged under by the force of suction. In a moment or two the pair were left astern.

Feeling the shock of the cold water, Rollings's first instinctive act was to try to keep himself afloat. Curiously, he would not, at first, let go of the iron box, which, with its contents, weighed many pounds.

Now, over the top of a rolling wave Ted Dyer's head appeared. All this had taken place in a few seconds.

"You want to catch me—you want the money!" sputtered Rollings, expelling a spray of water from his mouth. "You shall do neither!"

Clutching tightly at the box as an aid to his own drowning, Frank Rollings let himself go beneath the surface.

Promptly Ted went down after him, swimming straight and lustily.

Another figure sprang forward and downward, shark-like, through the water. This was

Tom Halstead, who, with his stoutest strokes, had just reached the scene.

Between them Tom and Ted succeeded in seizing the box. By a common impulse, for they could not talk, they forced it from Rollings, rising to the surface.

“Blub-bub-bub—whew!”

Rollings, rising to the surface, made that noise as he fought for breath. The cashier, an excellent swimmer, saw the two boys, a dozen feet away, swimming and holding up the box.

“Neither me nor the money shall you have!” he roared, striking out at a strong overhand swimming gait. He was almost upon them like a flash.

But there was another there, too. Joe Dawson had also leaped over from the rail of the motor yacht. Joe got along just in time to swim between Rollings and the two boys who were doing their best to keep up and hold the iron box, too.

“Back for yours! Go away back and float!” cried Joe, pushing one of his fighting hands against the cashier’s face.

“I’ll take *you* down, then, or the box!” screamed Rollings.

“Oh, all right, then. Take me,” mocked Joe. “I’m used to it.”

Furiously the pair fought in that rolling sea.

Joe devoted every energy, first of all, to keeping the cashier from winding his arms around him.

Presently Rollings gave up that effort, trying to dodge around Joe and get at the other pair, who, swimming slowly, were at the same time managing to keep that precious iron box afloat. This latter task, easy at first, soon became difficult. As the minutes passed the box became more and more of a burden, until it threatened to drag both swimmers under. Yet they hung to it manfully.

Up on the bridge of the "Victor" Jed Prentiss had his own hard task to perform.

Almost at the outset the swimmers had vanished in the fog astern. Jed Prentiss instantly gave orders for the steam yacht to stop and reverse the screw. At the same time he ordered the "Victor" to go around hard-a-port. Even this circle had to be one of large diameter.

"No hails down there on the deck!" rang Jed's voice, sternly. "No confusion of calls. Let me do all the hailing."

Megaphone in hand, young Prentiss stood at the port bridge rail.

"Ahoy!" he roared, through the megaphone.

Again and again he repeated the call. At last he thought he heard an answer out of the deeps.

“Louder!” he roared. “Give us your position.”

Suddenly, some sixty feet off the rail, Jed just made out the heads of Joe Dawson and Frank Rollings.

The cashier was floating, now, making no resistance, for Joe had struck him a blow across the head with his clenched fist. Rollings, stunned, floated unresistingly, supported by Dawson.

“We’ll have a boat to you in a jiffy!” shouted Jed, while Bickson threw a life preserver with almost perfect aim.

Now, the “Victor,” whose speed had been slowing down, was stopped.

Joe and his charge had drifted just out of sight, but a boat was quickly lowered, under command of Bickson, and reached the pair, after hailing.

“Where’s the captain?” demanded the quartermaster, as Joe and Rollings were hauled in.

“Hail ’em. They’re close at hand,” Joe replied.

The first hail brought an answer. In a few moments more the iron box was carefully brought over the side into the small boat. Finally Tom and Ted nimbly joined the others.

“Get back to the yacht as quickly as you can. Rollings may come to, and, fighting in a small

boat like this, he could make it unsafe—for the money,” Captain Tom Halstead added, with a wan grin.

Little time passed before strong hands bore the iron box up over the side of the “Victor.” Then Frank Rollings, just beginning hazily to come to, was carried up. This time he was handcuffed, to remain so until San Francisco should be reached.

It was an anxious conference that gathered in the main cabin as Assistant District Attorney Jephson proceeded to force the iron box that had come within a hair’s breadth of going to the bottom of the ocean. The three boys who had gone overboard after it stood by in their dripping garments.

As the lid of the sheet-iron box went up, a subdued cheer arose. This increased in volume to a din as Mr. Jephson swiftly tore the paper wrappings from one of the packages that he had lifted out. The first tightly-packed bale of crisp, new thousand-dollar bills was in view.

“All of the stolen money—the whole three million dollars—appears to be here,” announced Mr. Jephson, presently, as he began placing the bales back in the iron box, which, now that it was open, proved not to be as thick or solid as it looked when closed.

“Then I’m off to where I can get dry and

warm," muttered Tom Halstead. "Come along, fellows."

It was all over but making the anchorage at San Francisco. There was a somewhat long, though uneventful cruise, through fog that lasted to the end. With the "Panther's" crew divided up between two boats, the work was hard, indeed. It was a welcome hour to all when anchorage was finally made not far from the foot of Market Street, San Francisco.

Frank Rollings was afterwards tried, convicted, and sentenced to twenty years' confinement, which he is now serving.

Captain Blake was convicted of firing upon the "Panther," of running without lights or signals, and of attempting to resist United States officers. He was sent to prison for twelve years. Blake confessed that the idea in turning back on the course was to elude the "Panther," and then seek a lonely point on the coast of Mexico for landing.

Nor did Cragthorpe escape, his sentence being ten years for the part he had played. Yet, before he was sent away, this wretch gave the evidence which cleared Robert Gentry of the crime of which the latter stood accused. Young Gentry was released, exonerated, and Rose Gentry, whom Tom Halstead had briefly befriended on the Overland Mail at Oakland, wedded her

own heart's choice, the broad-shouldered young man who had met her at the San Francisco ferry mole.

Cragthorpe, as it was afterwards learned, had been serving Rollings for some time, and Cragthorpe it was who, having made the acquaintance of Gaston Giddings, lured the latter into the opium dens of Chinatown. Had Cragthorpe succeeded in wedding Rose Gentry—and her fortune—he might have discarded Rollings. As it was, he participated deeply in Rollings's crimes, and had absconded from San Francisco with him on board the "Victor" as a fighting man and trusted agent.

Gaston Giddings has been broken of the fearful curse of the opium habit, but he is no longer president of the Sheepmen's Bank. He is naturally too weak-willed for prominent service in the financial world.

Ted Dyer, you may be sure, became a member of the Motor Boat Club, going into its engineer squad. Ted's worthless, heartless uncle was arrested on his return to San Francisco, and a new guardian, who was appointed for Ted, secured the young man's full inheritance back out of the property of the uncle.

All of our young Motor Boat Club friends remained aboard the "Panther" for the balance of the winter and well into the spring. They had

many enjoyable cruises, though none as exciting as the one just closed.

The reward that the directors of the Sheepmen's Bank voted to all hands for the recovery of the three million dollars, made the bank accounts of these sturdy, brave young navigators swell considerably. Not, however, that any of Captain Tom Halstead's comrades needed money, for they have that which is worth far more—the power that strong hands, brave hearts and fearless, truthful eyes bring to any human being when rightly employed.

It is possible, even very likely, that we may yet again meet up with these splendid young fellows, who stand for the new type in American power of the seas in the twentieth century.

In the meantime, let us hail Tom Halstead, Joe Dawson, and all the other resourceful, capable and brave lads with their own famous club yell:

“M. B. C. K.! M. B. C. K.! Motor Boat Club. WOW!”

[THE END.]



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